

RESTORING THE BLACK CHURCH TO ITS MULTIFAITH IDENTITY:  
HONORING AFRICAN WORSHIP

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## ABSTRACT

### RESTORING THE BLACK CHURCH TO ITS MULTIFAITH IDENTITY: HONORING AFRICAN WORSHIP

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The traditional Black Baptist Church utilizes a European protestant construct of worship liturgy, which too often does not reflect its inherent traditional African religious worship practices, save the socio-cultural artistic genre evidenced during an ecstatic Black church worship service. Restoring the Black Church to its Multi Faith identity by honoring some African Worship traditions, presupposes that the traditional black Baptist Church not be afraid to embrace its Afro centric roots expressed in Worship by exploring aspects of this worshipful blackness: the clamor, the rhythm, the emotion, the exclusivity, the distinctiveness that surmises the complexion of worship. All of which burgeons from a multi faith African worship practice which survived the middle passage, and the American Slave Church.

This demonstration project will produce a legacy liturgy model that will embrace some tenants of the traditional African religious worship practices to restore Mt. Calvary Baptist Church to its multifaith identity by honoring some African worship traditions.

## DEDICATION

To my darling, sweet precious wife, Renee Woodard-Flowers, your continued Sankofa support continues to propel me to seek truth and healing.

To my loving children, Radiance and Solomon, your patience and resilience continues to teach and inspire.

To my loving Pratts for unconditional love and support.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To the Mount Calvary Baptist Church of Springfield, Massachusetts through your love and support you have fostered a deeper love and understanding of my developing Theology. This project would have failed without your dedication and prayers. Thank you for allowing the Flowers to serve you.

To Eboney, a true worshipper, and her parents, Brother and Sister Davis, for all your feisty support. Good looking out.

To Sister Jacklyn Mason, for all your countless hours of dedicated commitment.



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## CHAPTER 1 THE NEED FOR RESTORATION

### **Introspective-My Angst Rooted in a Black Baptist Church**

Perhaps there was a real element of difficulty in previous attempts to distinguish the Black ekklesia from Greek lettered fraternal organizations, secret lodges, and even community civic clubs because they all shared a similar aptitude towards edification through the communal safety resulting from membership in the Black Church. The difficulty may have been particularly true for those who had a real notion of their oppressed status and had become accustomed to being rejected by the dominant group and prevailing culture. This is all too obvious in the experience of Black church women like my mother, who had to do Days Work cleaning White folks houses, from sun up to sun down, nurture their children who would call her by her first name, Hazel, as opposed to Miss Hazel. She received a minimal pay with the fringe benefit of second-hand clothes or leftover food from her varied employers. There were five employers to be exact, which comprised Monday through Friday of Days Work. But come Sunday morning, Black church sisters, just like my mom, would don an ornate chapeau on their head, as in the actual coronation of a queen commensurate with Peter's biblical description in First Peter 2:9 of a "royal priesthood, holy nation and peculiar people". These women would strut their stuff into church and would acknowledge each others' temporary status based upon communal, yet personal, "mustard seed faith", which has the power to shift the proverbial mountain of their Monday through Friday oppression to the

hope of royal kinship in the family of God. Indeed, Black people saw the Church as the best hope for Black people in that it provided a “safe space in which to rise, compete, and work on both their spiritual and material standing.”<sup>1</sup> Moreover, community organization, up to and including the church, was their joy: “the world they knew did not give them joy nor could the world take it away.”<sup>2</sup>

The church has always been a place for self-reflection and self-constitution. The people who attended these churches were in crises and had similar issues, but they found healing and reorientation by linking to a community with a shared narrative of the world. Black churches in North America formed clubs of congregants from the same southern states with shared memories and experiences – assuredly a melting pot of justified edification. Out of this framework emerged the Black Church who has become increasingly more viable as a political force speaking against oppression, although it had also become a social outlet for Blacks who could not gain entry in other public agencies.

### **The Black Baptist Church Needs Restoration**

The Greek word for church: Ekklesia means “a called out group”, which is not the same as a “put out group”. Black people needed the cohesiveness of community they found in the Black Church to establish the realization that “called out” is not mutually exclusive to being “put out.” For they have been called out to be put out along with all those who empathize with their plight. Hence, regardless of race, creed, or culture, the empathizers must also identify as those who are called out to be put out. They all

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<sup>1</sup> Robert A. Orsi, *Gods of the City: Religion and the American Urban Landscape* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999), 55.

<sup>2</sup> Negro Spiritual, Public Domain.

comprise a special group God has chosen which yields the Church universal, and which undoubtedly include a plethora of issues that causes people to be ostracized and oppressed by the dominant elite class. German theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer states that human existence can only be understood in the church and revelation is experienced only in the church. Bonhoeffer defines revelation as not the past remembered, but as something that exists presently and continually in the church.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, the interpretation of the multifaith beginnings of the Black Baptist Church, in a liturgical design using the rubric of African Worship practices, would allow Black Baptist parishioners to revive their cultural memory of their royal priestly status thereby receiving prophetic revelation to propel them forward in positive community growth via restoration.

The process of restoration of the Black Baptist church has been preoccupied with the overwhelming reality of the Black parishioners whose mountain of oppression incurs more hours of confinement and restraint simply because they are Black in America. Despite the consequences of race, the pain from the scars of oppression is temporarily anesthetized during the worship gathering. Thus they gather early and stay late to get a “good fix” that will sustain them until the next worshipful gathering. Karl Marx, Philosopher and sociologist who shaped communism in the twentieth century, described the aforementioned paradigm of religion as the “Opiate of the People”. According to Marx, religion is an expression of material realities and economic injustice.<sup>4</sup> Thus,

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<sup>3</sup> Dalls M. Roark, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer-The Church: Objective Source of Revelation*; <http://www.religion-online.org/showchapter.asp?title=2737&C=2486>

<sup>4</sup> Austin Cline, “Religion as Opium of the People; Karl Marx, Religion, and Economics,” About.com Guide <http://atheism.about.com/od/philosophyofreligion/a/marx.htm>

problems in religion are ultimately problems in society. Religion is not the disease, but merely a symptom. It is used by oppressors to make people feel better about the distress they experience due to being poor and exploited. Hence, the subordinate group or class will use religion to navigate their world and make them safe. But in reality, these Black Baptist parishioners, before being enslaved in America, were religious African people, and from the continent of Africa burgeons the historical trajectory of religious change:<sup>5</sup> that inspires restoration. Thus there is no restoration without transformation. The transformational change occurs when the contemporary Black Baptist parishioner can place religion in a particular historical perspective devoid of culture that will facilitate their growth process towards restoration. The fact is that religion and culture are inextricable but are not identical.<sup>6</sup> We find that Africans are uniquely religious and strongly influenced by their own faith. In addition, they claim universality for the conception of God in all systems of African religious thought, which could arguably be misconstrued as religion and culture being the same. This notion is further perpetuated through the implementation of traditional African religion in community which then yields its particular culture.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, traditional Africans share a basic instinct of gregariousness with all human kind, who generally live together and form community. The commonality of African life is shared intensely evidenced by communal farmland,

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<sup>5</sup> Sylvia R. Frey and Betty Wood. *Come Shouting to Zion: African American Protestantism in the American South and British Caribbean to 1830* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

<sup>6</sup> T. J. Gorringer, *The Common Good and the Global Emergency: God and the Built Environment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 23.

<sup>7</sup> Benjamin C. Ray and Robin Horton, "Review of Patterns of Thought in Africa and the West: Essays on Magic, Religion and Science," *The Journal of Religion* 75, no. 2 (1995): 310-311.

economic trees, streams, barns and markets. They also have communal shrines, town public squares, ritual objects and festivals for recreational activity, as well as for social, economic and religious purposes.<sup>8</sup>

Perhaps it was safe for Africans to subconsciously equate culture with religion prior to European proselytization. Those types of missionaries failed to join African community, but rather destroyed the cohesiveness the commune resulting in the practice of their religion being the proverbial anesthetic the African community needed to cope with life on a daily basis. This prototype resulting from racist oppression has endured and prevailed through the North Atlantic Slave Trade to the present day religious worship practice of the traditional Black Baptist Church. They have forgotten their multifaith identity of a formidable spirituality which had allowed them to be true kings and queens. This multifaith identity is a reinterpretation of White Christianity with the remnants of African religions uncovered in the invisible institution of the chattel church. Granted, enslaved Africans did not have direct access to the specifics of their former African practices and beliefs, still they maintained some African religious ideas in the theological habit they brought with them to North America.<sup>9</sup>

Restoration can be appreciated in the distinction between religion and culture. Swiss Reformed theologian, Karl Barth, believed that European Christianity was a form of polytheism, not resulting from Trinitarian Theology but because he considered an idolatrous harnessing of the deity to a particular political agenda-namely the economic

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<sup>8</sup>Christopher I. Ejizu, "African Traditional Religions and the Promotion of Community-Living in Africa," [www.afrikaworld.net/afrel/community.htm](http://www.afrikaworld.net/afrel/community.htm) (accessed September 15, 2009).

<sup>9</sup> Dwight N. Hopkins, *Shoes That Fit Our Feet: Sources for a Constructive Black Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 15.

benefit of North American slavery. Seeing the need to break this cultural captivity of the Church, which utilized what Barth termed, cultural Protestantism – the identification of religion as elitist culture and illumination, Barth spoke of faith rather than religion.<sup>10</sup>

Barth argues that God cannot be imprisoned by a human construct such as religion.

Religions are mortal and die, having a fundamental non-necessity. Whereas faith is

“respect before the divine incognito”, love of God is conscious of the qualitative

distinction between God and human beings. Therefore religion must be understood

through paradox. Barth says:

To speak of God is not to speak of religion because this is the place where human beings bolt and bar themselves against God. Just where people believe they are raising themselves above common lusts and failings, precisely there, in religion, do they find themselves on the ‘highest summit in the kingdom of sin.’<sup>11</sup>

Religion for Black Baptist parishioners continues to be a methodical way to practice faith, but it fails miserably at liberation and is subsequently restorative when understood as a paradoxical nomenclature.

As Pastor of Mount Calvary Baptist Church in Springfield, Massachusetts, a traditional Black Baptist Church, I have observed a “disconnect” from the traditional African religious worship practices. This demonstration project will produce a legacy liturgy model that will embrace some tenants of the traditional African religious worship practices to restore Mount Calvary Baptist Church to its “multifaith identity” by honoring some African worship traditions. The traditional Black Baptist Church like the Mount Calvary Baptist Church applies an Anglican format for their Sunday morning worship

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<sup>10</sup> Gorringe, *Common Good and the Global Emergency*, 38.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

liturgy that seldom reflects the tenets of traditional African worship practices, save the ecstatic cultural genre experienced during a Black Church Worship Service. Restoring the Black Church to its multifaith identity by honoring some African worship traditions, presupposes that the traditional Black Baptist Church not be afraid to embrace its Afro-centric roots that are inherently expressed during the corporate worship experience. Exploring the notion of a worshipful Blackness or, as Omar McRoberts has labeled, “religious particularism” is to embrace differences in ones religious worship culture against the milieu of oppression, inequality and stereotyping. McRoberts equates particularism as a religious life of “living in the world, but not of the world”. This idea closely paralleled and deeply validated the existential realities of the enslaved Africans who struggled to navigate a strange social terrain that was oppressive.<sup>12</sup>

The Anglican worship format used by enslaved Africans was forced upon them by Anglican religious leaders from London who proselytized enslaved Africans because they detested the African worship practices that were used. One such leader, Morgan Godwyn, claimed that the enslaved Africans “clung tenaciously to their heathen rites and their barbarous behavioral practices in worship in addition to their being Polygamist who worshipped with idolatrous dances and revels they brought out of Africa. Indeed European Anglicans felt scandalized by the feasting, drinking, music making and dance that took place during the ceremonial religious rites of the slaves.”<sup>13</sup> Regrettably, the Anglican missionaries had literally cornered the market on proselytizing slaves and were delighted when they observed the slaves incorporating the Apostles Creed, the Ten

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<sup>12</sup> Omar M. McRoberts, *Streets of Glory: Church and Community in a Black Urban Neighborhood* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2003), 64.

<sup>13</sup> Frey and Wood, *Come Shouting to Zion*, 47.

Commandments and the Lord's Prayer into their worship rituals.<sup>14</sup> Undoubtedly, these missionaries felt successful as these enslaved Africans learned to acquiesce to the environment imposed upon them forming an underground worship initiative or an invisible institution. Assuredly the slave trade devastated African religious systems. Yet those African slaves who survived the Middle Passage showed enormous courage, resilience, and ingenuity in devising new religious structures to cope with the demands that enslavement made on them. The physical, psychological, and emotional brutality of the Middle passage did not destroy their memories or beliefs which they put to creative use in America by establishing the multifaith worship genre of the Black Baptist Church.<sup>15</sup>

Although Christianity had been in Egypt and Ethiopia, most Africans transported from their West African homeland in the early nineteenth century would encounter Christianity for the first time in America. Still these Africans adhered to their own versions of Islam, Christianity and indigenous forms of worship, placing these religious convictions alongside the traditional forms of religion imposed upon them in the New World. Dr. Kamal Ali; Director of Minority Affairs, a Lecturer at Westfield State College in Westfield, Massachusetts, and a Moslem brother; argues this point, stating that the more frequent challenge to Muslim slaves attempting to cling to Islamic practices was not faithfulness to animism, but resisting forced conversion to Christianity by slave owners and others desirous of ridding slaves of loyalty to Islam, as was the case with

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<sup>14</sup> Frey and Wood, *Come Shouting to Zion*, 65.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 36.



Omar ibn Said, Salih Bilali, and Abdur-Rahman.<sup>16</sup> Still the ritualistic expressions of these religious convictions were similar those of West and West Central African, but the local circumstances in which enslaved Africans found themselves dictated that they could not be identical. Therefore enslaved Africans pieced together new systems from the remnants of the old even though slave owners and Anglican missionaries mounted a systematic and brutal campaign to de-Africanize them by stripping them of their mostly animist and Muslim beliefs, indoctrinating them into North American Christian dogma.<sup>17</sup>

There is a prevailing distinction between Muslim and Animist slaves regarding their worship, although their religious beliefs and ceremonies were broadly similar in West Africa. There existed multi-ethnic populations during the big empire eras of Ghana, Mali and Songhay whose Kings and aristocrats were largely Muslims of which their shared ideas circulated regionally in religious tradition. Lisa Lindsay writes in her work, *West African Kingdoms Before the Slave Trade*:

That West African religion comprised four categories of supernatural phenomena interacting with each other and with humankind: a creator god remote from everyday affairs and difficult to communicate with; spirits believed to live in the earth, waters, plants and animals; amulets, which Blacksmiths made to contain the magical powers of vegetable, animal and mineral substances; and ancestors, who could intercede with other spirits on behalf of their descendants and the community at large.<sup>18</sup>

First Animism is an ancient philosophy that views everything in nature as having an indwelling spirit or soul such as plants, rocks animals, celestial bodies, humans and

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<sup>16</sup> Allan D. Austin, *African Muslims in Antebellum America* (New York: Routledge, 1997); Dr. Kamal Ali, email message to author, March 2, 2010.

<sup>17</sup> Dr. Kamal Ali, contributor, Appendix 1.

<sup>18</sup> Lisa Lindsay, "West African Kingdoms before the Slave Trade," [www.dlt.ncssm.edu/lmtm/docs/Af\\_kingdom/script\\_no\\_picts.pdf](http://www.dlt.ncssm.edu/lmtm/docs/Af_kingdom/script_no_picts.pdf)

insects.<sup>19</sup> The only similarity between animist and Muslim beliefs would be the notions of “mushrikeen” or idol worship, which were central to Islamic belief, and have been viewed as, according to the Qur’an and the Traditions of the Prophet, “the only sin that Allah, the Most Merciful, will never forgive,” because the association of partners or objects of worship other than Allah, God Almighty.<sup>20</sup> This is a central pillar in Islam, known as “tauhid” or the essentiality of worship God as One, an article of Faith that found its first formal expression in the Ten Commandments, to which Muslims are faithful. Islam was firmly established in Fouta Djallon, the highland region in the center of Guinea, West Africa and in Futa Tooro the region by the Senegal River which predates the Big Empires; these African Muslims were the first to launch a Jihad against animist in the eighteenth century. Islam, prior to the North Atlantic Slave trade, was the religion of literate West Africans who grimaced at Animism because it was considered the practice of indigenous tribal people to whom they felt superior. However Animism is the oldest form of religion on the planet that equipped the big empires of Africa with the concept of the Sacred and of a mysterious creative force in the universe. Thus Islam was established in West Africa, not on the ruins of Animism because the principles of Animism, namely (a) the sacred and secular character of daily life, (b) the human community or the universe, and (c) the existence of a transcendent Supreme Being, along with the immanent presence of his power in all things and in all places find its

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<sup>19</sup> Joel D. Beversluis, *Sourcebook of the World's Religions: An Interfaith Guide to Religion and Spirituality* (Novato, CA: New World Library, 2000), 116.

<sup>20</sup> Kamal Ali contributor; Appendix 1

continuation in Islam.<sup>21</sup> Still a number of Africans did not reject White proselytized Christianity. Rather they combined it with traditional African practices (the cultural remnants) and developed their own, unique worship genre. Africans who embraced Christianity did so on their own terms, making it a unique expression of their hopes, while rejecting versions of the gospel that justified slavery. These multifaith African worship practices that coagulated on the slave ships survived the Middle Passage and became the Invisible Institution of the Chattel Slave Church. Yet it is concealed and sometimes missing from the liturgy of the present-day traditional Black Baptist Church.

### **Bringing Black Back**

There is a worshipful Blackness from Africa and this complexion of worship is embodied in the clamor, the rhythm, the sensation, the movement and the distinctiveness that is expressed in traditional Black Baptist worship as a spontaneous eruption that is permitted though shunned. Using cultural memory of African worship practices, European notions of the Christian faith, and reflections on their hardships of their enslavement in North America, Africans were able to produce their own type of Christian expression encapsulated in their liturgy. The Sankofa Liturgy Model proposed will revive the cultural memory of the Mount Calvary Baptist Church's African Worship heritage by producing a worship program that reflects the tenants of traditional African Worship. The use of the mythical Akon bird of Africa called Sankofa symbolizes this explorative liturgy in that the Sankofa bird flies forward while its head looks backward, meaning that one knows where they are going while knowing where they have been.

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<sup>21</sup> Amadou Hampâté Bâ, "Aspects of African Civilization (Person, Culture, Religion)," trans. Susan B. Hunt, <http://pender.ee.upenn.edu/~rabii/toes/BaAspectsCh4.html>

Indeed the notion of a worshipful complexion when practiced by traditional Black Baptist through a Sankofa Liturgy Model serves as a conduit to the restorative process of the traditional Black Baptist church to its multifaith identity by honoring some African worship traditions – proverbially *Bringing Black Back* in a relevant and substantial form to the Sunday morning liturgy. The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King said:

We can honor the memory of African heritage by rediscovering the faith that allowed our forbearers to survive. We can build on the legacy they have left by carefully following the one they followed.<sup>22</sup>

The Sankofa worship model can assist the Mount Calvary Baptist Church of Springfield, Massachusetts in transitioning from a Euro-centric worship to a time-honored African worship that is respected and sought after.

Regrettably, the widely accepted complexion of worship consist of a West-World View, an early Anglican perspective that engenders the self-subordinate status of Black people which maintains cultural, racial and economic oppression. Whereas the Europeans are able to point to their long line of ancestors that came from England, Ireland, Scotland and Greece; Blacks can only relate to the African Rain Forest and slavery, albeit an ancestry that does not provide a platform for dignity nor self-respect.<sup>23</sup> The strategic economic development plans implemented by Black churches such as the Greater Allen Cathedral in Jamaica, Queens and New Birth Baptist Church in Atlanta have been successful in lifting their neighboring Black community from oppression. They have provided cars for single parents, housing, child care, Rites of Passage

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<sup>22</sup> Joyce Andrews, *Bible Legacy of the Black Race: The Prophecy Fulfilled* (Nashville, TN: Winston-Derek Publishers, 1993), 31.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

programs and many other community initiatives that began by a break from the traditional perimeters of their denominations, namely the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) and Baptist denominations.

Assuredly, these seeds were sown in the Black complexion of their liturgy which celebrates their multifaith identity ranging from imagery to performance, albeit the result of an invisible institution that survived the Middle Passage. Michael Battle, author of *The Black Church in America African American Christian Spirituality*, writes:

African American Christian spirituality emerges through its particularity of dynamic and corporate worship. Such worship demonstrates that the meaning of human life in the Black Church flows from the community to the person, whereas in White America there is often an inverse flow of meaning originating in the individual that only sometimes leads to community.<sup>21</sup>

### **The Traditional Black Baptist Church**

Definitively the traditional Black Baptist Church has less of an affinity towards community reflecting more of its chattel origin that reveals an historic subordinate. Herein raises the idea of theodicy. Whereas the Black Baptist church preaches the love of Christ, forgiveness and the justification of oppression, there is embarrassing counter-evidence to what has and is occurring in the Black community.<sup>24</sup> The traditional Black Baptist Church displays a disconnect from their community by offering condescending, “drop-in-the-bucket” initiatives such as holiday food baskets and a few coat drives. Actually, the traditional Black Baptist church has the potential to effectively connect to its own community simply because the church building remains in the neighborhood, but

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<sup>24</sup> Michael Battle, *The Black Church in America: African American Christian Spirituality*, Religious Life in America (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub, 2006), 68.

it prefers to acquiesce to its Chattel past by behaving as a divinely exclusive social agency.

There is nothing worse than entering a Black Church only to observe illustrations of a White Jesus, again provocatively the Dominant-elite reinforces its influence over the subordinate, namely Black people, even in their worship. This has contributed immensely to the inferiority complex that exists among Black people, often self-inflicted. James C. Scott, in his work *Domination and the Arts of Resistance Hidden Transcripts*, describes this type of self-inflicted subordinate status as a sense of “false consciousness or quiescence in which the dominant ideology works its influence by persuading the subordinate groups to believe actively in the values that explain and justify their own subordination.”<sup>25</sup> Furthermore the false consciousness of Black worshippers is due to a Western-World view of God being White commensurate with his blonde, blue-eyed son being savior of all. Indeed this is a prime example of hegemony, which represents the institutionalized power-dominant, elite class has maintained over its subordinate. Regrettably the traditional Black Baptist Church has supported this Anglican complexion of worship causing it to fail miserably at the edifying its own community. Therefore the prototype of a traditional Black Baptist Church in America is one that is less likely to embrace moaning, dancing, shouting, dark skin, green consciousness, shaking, flamboyancy, indigenous and Islamic components of liturgy that clearly defines the multifait identity of the Black Baptist Church. The importance of the felt presence of the Holy Spirit through shouting and spirit possession relates to a similar importance placed on an “Africanism” of spirit possession that goes back to West African spiritual

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<sup>25</sup> James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 72.

practices.<sup>26</sup> Hence enslaved Africans in North America found a spiritually relevant affinity with Baptist because the emphasis on spiritual conversion translated well into the African belief in the dynamic world of the spirit. Early revivalist Baptist worship for these enslaved Africans was able to link an African past with a North American present. Herein is the multifaith restorative Sankofa challenge towards change for a traditional Black Baptist Church; specifically the Mount Calvary Baptist Church of Springfield, Massachusetts.

### **Transformation through Sankofa Liturgy**

The word Sankofa from the Akan language of Ghana simply means to “go back and take.” Sankofa uses an Adrinka symbol of a bird flying forward while its head is turned backwards illustrating the need to take from the past what is good to progress in a positive and effective manner in the future with knowledge. It is here, in the Sankofa Liturgy Model that the symbols and ritual dramas of Black life are actualized, cultivated, and ceremonialized. It is within the veil of this traditional Black Baptist Church that the parishioners of Mount Calvary will create, interpret, articulate and preserve the rich cultural and spiritual traditions of both African American people and their African ancestors via the matrix of liturgy, with the hope that this will further empower them to realize their greater human potential, both as individuals and as a community of faith.<sup>27</sup>

Restoring the Black Church to its multifaith identity, honoring African Worship, requires that we first raise awareness of the multifaith identity and the African heritage worship practices exhibited in the traditional Black Baptist Church. We propose to do so

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<sup>26</sup> Battle, *Black Church in America*, 61.

<sup>27</sup> Grenaé Dudley, Denise McDuffie, and Carlyle Fielding Stewart, *Sankofa: Celebrations for the African American Church* (Cleveland, OH: United Church Press, 1997), X.

through informative workshops on the formation of the African American Baptist Church; exploring other faith practices, both past and present, that have influenced worship in the African Diaspora; and creating a support team that will produce a new liturgy format called the Sankofa Liturgy Model.



## CHAPTER 2 HISTORY – A TRADITIONAL BLACK BAPTIST CHURCH

A traditional Black Baptist church in America such as the Mount Calvary Baptist Church of Springfield, Massachusetts incorporates a Sunday morning liturgy that is dually indicative of their chattel church origin and the remnants of the African traditional worship that survived the Middle Passage through the cultural memory of enslaved Africans. Moreover the multifaith essence of the traditional African worship practice includes Christianity that pre-dates the European Missionary expeditions, Islam and a plethora of indigenous African Spiritual practices that survived the fusion of an American-European liturgy that was forced upon the chattel church which defines the multifaith liturgy of the Mount Calvary Baptist Church of Springfield, Massachusetts.

At a first look from Interstate 91, Springfield, Massachusetts appears to be a stunning and thriving metropolis with major hotels and corporate structures whose towering landscapes border the Interstate. One can clearly see both the Sheraton and Marriott Hotels, Mass Mutual, TD Bank and even a neon sign advertising Springfield's own Peter Pan Transportation Company; thereby giving an illusion of a thriving market economy on Springfield's main street. Yet as one journeys off Interstate 91 via any of the highway exits two through nine, they receive a closer glance of the cities poorly paved streets interpreting a blighted, desolate city blemished by a citizenry of the homeless, the mentally ill, substance abuser, and bordered and burned residences. Yet Springfield is the largest city on the Connecticut River, and the seat of Hampden County,

Massachusetts. Springfield boasts such luminaries as Theodor Seuss Geisel, better known as Dr. Seuss, the children's author, and James Naismith, the inventor of Basketball. As a result of the latter, Springfield is called the "Birth Place of Basketball" and has erected the Basketball Hall of Fame in downtown Springfield, on the east bank of the Connecticut River.<sup>28</sup> Herein is where the quagmire of contemporary cosmopolitan architecture converges with urban decay that is condensed in areas both north and south of central downtown and smattered through the 33.2 square miles of the city.

The area farthest north of central downtown called the "North End" had a history of being a predominantly Black community. Although Springfield played a crucial role in the abolitionist movement and attracted African Americans during the Great Migration, racial discrimination shaped the geography and social patterns of the city through the twentieth century. The greatest migration of Blacks to Springfield occurred between 1905 through the World War I era because of employment opportunities at the Smith and Wesson gun manufacturer, the Milton Bradley Toy Company and Merriam Publishers; as well as Black individuals seeking better educational opportunities for their children. The majority of these Black people came from the southern states of Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia. Indeed these populations that had common experiences which added to the cohesiveness of their community and settlement, which was confined to three inner city neighborhoods; over a third of which settled in the North End. From 1905 to approximately 1914, the Black population grew from 1,253 to 1,841. Of the 894 Blacks employed, 75.5% were unskilled and non-unionized laborers, 22.4%

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<sup>28</sup> [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Springfield,\\_Massachusetts](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Springfield,_Massachusetts)

skilled laborers, and 1.9% were considered professionals. Black women were primarily domestics and laundry workers.<sup>29</sup>

### **Mount Calvary Community:**

#### **History of Mount Calvary Baptist Church of Springfield**

The twentieth century for Black people in Springfield could be surmised as an era in which community organizations (business enterprises, fraternal organizations and churches) flourished and became a formidable agency of change in the Black community, particularly in the North End. The Black church in particular was active in creating a better life economically, socially and spiritually for the community. In 1919, the Mount Calvary Baptist Church was organized in West Springfield (a separate municipality located on the West Side of the Connecticut River). Then, a year later, the congregation decided to move across the river to the North End to better serve the Black community. Started by a group of eight people, Mount Calvary Baptist Church under the leadership of the first Pastor, Reverend Silas L. Dupree, a South Carolina native, acquired the Old Patch House on Auburn Street in the North End section of Springfield to accommodate its 150 parishioners. Eventually the membership increased to 400 strong. Hence in 1924, Mount Calvary purchased the larger capacity, Beth Israel Congregational building on Grays Avenue. In addition to the various locations and property acquisitions, Dupree's defining ministerial achievements was becoming the first Black legislator in Springfield, and the first Black pastor and church to be accepted, and later to host the all-White

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<sup>29</sup> Imani Kazini, "Black Springfield: A Historical Study," *Contributions in Black Studies* 2, no. 1 (1978): 46, <http://scholarworks.umass.edu/cibs/vol2/iss1/4>.

Westfield Baptist Association.<sup>30</sup> In 1928, Reverend Dupree led the Mount Calvary Baptist Church in the formation of the Community Association, designed to carry out programs for youth and recreation for the community at large. This Association became the hub of Black activity in the North End section, and Mount Calvary quickly became the center of activity and assistance to the community, evidenced by their hot lunch program and the creation of a home for transient Black men on Grays Street.<sup>31</sup>

Mrs. Dorothy Malone Sanders, a current member of Mount Calvary Baptist Church and baptized under the leadership of Reverend Dupree as well as Calvary's subsequent seven Pastors, describes Reverend Dupree as being "a prolific leader way before his time that poised Mount Calvary into a beacon of social responsibility." Mrs. Sanders recounts the close knit community of the North End as a multicultural area in which the majority of Black people walked to worship at Mount Calvary. She stated that "Urban Renewal was really Negro Removal" as Black people were forced to leave their apartments for various building projects and relocate into the "Hill" section of Springfield.<sup>32</sup> This resulted in the church having a commuter membership and the North End being almost fully populated by Spanish-speaking Latino people.

The demographics of the community changed, but the church remained the same in regard to the race of its parishioners, which continues to be 100% African American, and in its worship genre which remains a traditional Euro-Anglican format. The varied developmental nuances in liturgy of the Mount Calvary Baptist Church had been reliant

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<sup>30</sup> The Mount Calvary Baptist Church Anniversary Journal (Appendix )

<sup>31</sup> Kazini, "Black Springfield," 53.

<sup>32</sup> Personal interview with Mrs. Dorothy Malone Sanders who lived in the North End from 1928-59; Baptized by Rev. Dupree; Appendix 2.

on the Pastoral leadership of its eight Pastors, in addition to the current social location of the Black community. During the early seventies, under the leadership of Mount Calvary's sixth Pastor, the church experienced a tremendous surge in its children and youth membership. This particular social location of Mount Calvary replicated the budding prosperity occurring in Springfield's Black community. Parishioners were making more money and getting better jobs, and entire families were coming to church. Therefore, this sixth Pastor added the "Children's Call" to the liturgy that comprised a part of worship when all the children and youth gather at the altar as a youth narrator presents a Christian Story for all to enjoy. The Children's Call was extremely difficult for the Pastor to institute because many parishioners believed the old adage of children being seen, but not heard. Indeed this was a major broadening of the church members' traditional mindset towards worship; essentially the place where their position confronts their social location. Granted, one's location forms their position, yet in order to explore the multifaceted essence of the liturgy of Mount Calvary, in order to create a Sankofa Liturgy Model, the participant must take risk in their position despite their location.

### **Mount Calvary's Liturgy**

The liturgy of the Mount Calvary Baptist Church serves as the worship format or "Order of Service" for the Sunday gathering of the Church. Typically it includes the following items: the Processional, the Invocation, Call to Worship, Hymns, Responsive Reading, Corporate Prayer, Scripture Readings, Special Choral Selections, Altar Prayer, Offerings, the Sermon, an Invitation to Christian Discipleship (membership solicitation), and ends with the Benediction. Atypically, each component of liturgy changes in execution and program placement based on the specific Pastoral leadership. There have

been nine Pastors in the 91-year ministry/history of the Mount Calvary Baptist Church. Undoubtedly these varied liturgical augmentations required that the members of Mount Calvary take many positional risks despite their social location. A major positional risk factor occurred when the ninth and present Pastor allowed a Deaconess (female Deaconate) to render the corporate prayer which was traditionally performed by a Deacon (male Deaconate). Moving farther away from Mount Calvary's traditional liturgy, the ninth Pastor added Praise/Worship Dance, recessional, lectionary textual readings, and switched the altar prayer from before to after the sermon. Still the most controversial augmentations to the worship format were the inclusion of drums, a "Praise Team" and dance. Granted the aforementioned worship inclusions are not generally considered to be components of liturgy per se, considering the varied use of the term *liturgy*. Liturgy for Mount Calvary is often juxtaposed in a gray area somewhere between worship genre and documented worship agenda, as in an itemized list of worship criterion executed during the Sunday gathering. Moreover, there are still members of Mount Calvary who continue to call the Sunday Morning Worship Guide the "bulletin" which points to the fact that most of the paper used for the guide is reserved for a plethora of announcements. In fact, a traditional, and even integral, part of the Sunday worship experience includes The Announcements that are always preceded by the host and/or hostess "Welcome to the Visitors" who have attended the particular Worship Service.

### **Liturgy Variations**

There is liturgy defined, and there is liturgy as defined by the Mount Calvary Baptist Church which varies within a rubric of age, church membership longevity, experience and taste. Basically the liturgy of the Mount Calvary Baptist Church is

generally referred to as an “Order of Worship”, program or a bulletin, titles of which are generally printed at the top of the Sunday worship guide. Mount Calvary’s notion of liturgy follows the textbook definition of the term which states that “liturgy is an established formula for public worship, a proscribed ritual which many churches use in their services and in their ceremonial rites.” Liturgy is not just varied within denominations, but it is has a varied use among faith traditions. For example, the liturgy can refer to the daily activity of the Muslim slat or attendance at a Quaker meeting. In some Christian religions, liturgical churches are referred to as those with an emphasis on a traditional practice where the words for worship and service are formally written out as opposed to a less structured worship service style. The staunch liturgical churches are the Roman Catholic, eastern Orthodox, and several Anglican and Lutheran churches.<sup>33</sup> Those who are not familiar with Afro-Christian Worship are under the misconception that these churches are non-liturgical churches and even some Black Baptist church members believe that they are non-liturgical worshippers because faith traditions such as Anglican, Roman Catholic, and Lutheran write out all the parts of a pre-planned worship service. Afro-Christian worship as it is practiced in the Baptist context is definitely liturgical, although the liturgy is not always shaped by prescribed forms. There still exist a framework of approaching God, hearing from God, and responding to God, from which we develop liturgy, a liturgy that is shaped by function. You may not hear the words of the votum and salutation, but the function they serve which is to invite the people to approach God in worship, exist in the music, story, or visual elements that begin the

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<sup>33</sup> All About Religion, “What is Liturgy,” [www.allaboutreligion.org/what-is-liturgy-faq.htm](http://www.allaboutreligion.org/what-is-liturgy-faq.htm) (accessed January 7, 2010).

service. The same is true for each element of the worship liturgy.<sup>34</sup> Dennis and Robin Stephenson Bratcher state that a fully liturgical church has very recognizable elements; although they vary based on the faith tradition; the basic elements are the same. The most important elements of liturgy include: communal prayer, reading and hearing the word of God, a response of confession, Eucharist, music, and the church year or lectionary.<sup>35</sup> There is no question that Mount Calvary Baptist Church is a liturgical church based on Bratcher's definition, for it implements the basic elements of liturgy save Eucharist monthly as opposed to weekly and the response of confession is not communal but personal, and individual.

The Afrocentricity of liturgy in a traditional Black Baptist Church like Mount Calvary is often in the form of celebration which demands ornateness. Black folks dress up for their Sunday morning liturgy; they could never fathom wearing jeans and sneakers to celebrate with God. Father Anthony Vader of the American Catholic Press says that

When they were forbidden because of prejudice to enter public gathering places, African-Americans isolated themselves to avoid conflict with prejudiced persons. This isolation could have been disastrous to their personalities. To restore their self-dignity they wore beautiful clothes symbolizing their inner worth. Their churches were places where they could wear stunning clothes, so dressing for the Lord had two purposes. Today African-Americans can enter any restaurant, hotel, or other assembly dressed as they want, and yet they still dress for the Lord. After all, they want to thank God that they can afford these clothes.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Andre Daley et al., "Black and Reformed: Perspective from Five African American Leaders," *Reformed Worship*, March 2006, 32, [http://www.reformedworship.org/magazine/article.cfm?article\\_id=1670](http://www.reformedworship.org/magazine/article.cfm?article_id=1670).

<sup>35</sup> Dennis Bratcher and Robin Bratcher-Stephenson, "What is Liturgy? Evangelicals and Liturgical Worship," *The Voice-Biblical and Theological Resources for Growing Christians*, <http://www.crivoice.org/whatisliturgy.html>.

<sup>36</sup> Father Anthony Vader, "What you can Learn from African-American Liturgy," *American Catholic Press*, [http://www.americancatholicpress.org/Father\\_Vader\\_African\\_American\\_Liturgy.html](http://www.americancatholicpress.org/Father_Vader_African_American_Liturgy.html) (accessed October 19, 2009).



Again restoring Black Baptist worshippers to their self-dignity is not limited to wearing fine clothing to church, but it burgeons and is encapsulated in their transitioning from a White Protestant, Euro-centric liturgy to one that incorporates their Blackness by incorporating some tenets of traditional African Worship. Jewish Theologian, Abraham Joshua Heschel's writing in the article *No Religion is an Island*, is the clarion call for people who are moving from hurtful social locations to minimize the concern of location. Granted, social location for Mount Calvary members might be ambiguous, certainly not monolithic, but Black people in general according to Heschel must always be mindful of the mystery of aloneness and uniqueness of its own being.<sup>37</sup> Thus a traditional Black Baptist church like Mount Calvary can celebrate its uniqueness when its members honor some African worship traditions, as opposed to proliferation of a liturgical format imposed on them while in their most victimized and vulnerable location. A devastating location that is generationally recyclable as it is translated to children and youth, to acquiesce to their particular notion of a dominant elite religious group.

### **Baptist**

As painstaking as it is, in order to ring true the idea of a "traditional" Black Baptist, the term Baptist, as a denomination, must be defined to understand the former. The Baptist denomination originates from the English Reformation during the turn of the sixteenth century, emerging out of the Puritan Movement that occurred in Elizabethan England. The Puritan Movement was a reform that purported the authority of scripture over the traditions of the church. Hence these early Baptist believed in religious liberty,

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<sup>37</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, Harold Kasimow, and Byron L. Sherwin. *No Religion Is an Island: Abraham Joshua Heschel and Interreligious Dialogue*. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991).

congregational governance of their churches, autonomy of the parish and the believer's baptism.<sup>38</sup> The doctrine of Christ is paramount to Baptist, based on their belief that Christ is a living presence among them, deeming the church as the body of Christ whose members are faithful believers of the same. Moreover Baptists believe in spiritual independence under God, based on the assumption that human beings are created in the image of God and among their greatest attributes is the God-given freedom to make choices; in other words, God created humanity to be a free moral agency.

The Baptist denomination ascribes to two principle sacraments or ordinances: the believer's baptism and the Lord's Supper. The believer's baptism represents the prescribed physical activity, a proverbial initiation rite of being submerged in water in obedience to Christ. Jesus' baptism, performed by John the Baptist as recorded in the Gospel of Matthew 3: 13-17, is an inaugural event of Christ's public ministry. For the Black Baptist believer, baptism is the public pronouncement that they have "accepted Christ as their Lord and Savior." The Lord's Supper Celebration is a re-enactment of the last meal Christ had with His disciples according to the Gospels. Baptists imagine themselves with the living Christ who passes the bread and the cup. The institution, or language, of this ordinance is extrapolated from the Apostle Paul's letter to the Corinthian Church recorded in I Corinthians 11: 24-25 (KJV). Here Paul informs the Christian Church of Jesus' directive of the Lord's Supper:

24- And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me.

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<sup>38</sup> William H. Brackney, *Baptists in North America: An Historical Perspective* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub, 2006), 1.

25- After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me.<sup>39</sup>

### **Multifaith Identity**

Although African American Baptists ascribe to the aforementioned definition of the denomination, there is uniqueness in their brand of Baptist that stems from the congregations gathered in the eighteenth century slave communities. Current African American Baptists have developed an associational life with a unique consciousness which merges classic Baptist traits with a unique character that is attributed to their Afro-centric culture. Although these Black Baptist found it difficult to relinquish their African worship traditions, several “scraped their African heritage” to become mainstreamed Baptist in order to gain access to benefits, such as health care and education, which seemed to follow the white Baptist evangelist.<sup>40</sup> The notion of enslaved Africans “scraping their African Heritage” is at best, oxymoronic in that their cultural memory of traditional African worship practices survived the creative merger with the dominant European practices of Christianity during the hardship of slavery. These traditional African worship practices, along with the multifaith ethic of such, lived covertly to and conjointly with Baptist via an invisible institution. The invisible institution consisted of secret religious meetings, called “hush harbors,” which incorporated a particular kind of Christianity that helped Africans deal with the existential crisis of slavery. In these secluded locations of the hush harbors, Africans would hear sermons by “their own”, sing spirituals, and rally to support one another. Although these meetings were illegal

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<sup>39</sup> Brackney, *Baptists in North America*, 2-3.

<sup>40</sup> Ronald, J. Allen, “Creating an Indigenous African Church,” Religion Online, <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=138>.

according to White people, Africans would still shout, praise and prophecy, and enjoy their fellowship with a liberating God.<sup>41</sup>

Assuredly, having a shared experience of oppression, strategically translating their African worship heritage into a format that would appease their oppressors, doing what they must in order to survive and having like skin color solidifies the African Americans' uniqueness and need for their own religious force by way of a Black Baptist movement. Dr. William H. Brackney, Director of Baptist Studies at Baylor University, describes the debate regarding the origin of the Black Baptist movement:

Did the Black Baptist movement emerge from informal religious gatherings on the plantations, or in the Black subcongregations that were included in White churches, north and south, or in the fully constituted churches that existed with white sanctions at the end of the eighteenth century? <sup>42</sup>

Common sense would presuppose that the Black Baptist movement emerged from all three of the Brackney types, and continues to evolve via the present faith tradition of the 15.7 million African American Baptists or in the 46% of all Baptists in America.

However, the initial coalitions of Black Baptists were found in the Separate Baptist experience because of its penchant towards de-emphasis of the outward character of individuals in matters of socio-economic class, gender and color. Separate Baptist evangelists, Phillip Mulkey and William Murphy, were responsible for starting the oldest known Black slave congregation in the American colonies in Mecklenburg, Virginia in 1750. This is negated, however, by the many substantial plantation gatherings that claim to be first. Yet the first Black Baptist congregation lead by Black clergy was the congregation planted in Silver Bluff, South Carolina founded by David George, a slave

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<sup>41</sup> Battle, *Black Church in America*, 58

<sup>42</sup> Brackney, *Baptists in North America*, 175

from Tidewater, Virginia. Andrew and Sampson Byran converted slaves at Tyree Island on the Savannah River in Georgia, and preached to and baptized other slaves at swamp meetings on the plantations, eventually establishing a church that met on the Byran plantation, and later within the city suburbs. Eventually the Georgia Baptist Association recognized the Byran plantation gathering as the first Black Baptist Church renamed the First Byran Baptist Church.<sup>43</sup> Claiming to be first in the establishment of the Black Baptist church is not particularly relevant save its regalia for competition among Black Churches and its definitive covert hegemonic operative as it preserves the division of the Black community through its most important cultural institution, namely religion. The fact that the Black Baptist Church establishment, namely its growth and existence, depended upon the permission and resources of White slave masters, and its emergence from the White Separate Baptist experience represents a very relevant sedge way into an apparent need for a Black Baptist denomination. The Black Baptist denomination emerged from the abolitionist crusades, the Civil War and Reconstruction, finding its origin in segregated associations in the South. From these segregated organizations emerged Baptist Associations, such as the Ohio Baptist Convention, the Providence Antislavery Missionary Baptist Association, the Union Baptist Antislavery Association in the Northern States, the Wood River Association of southwestern Illinois, the Amherstburg Association of Canada, the American Baptist Missionary Convention out of the Abyssinian Baptist Church of New York City, and the American Baptist Free Mission Society of Boston Massachusetts, all of which were predecessors to the 1894 launch of

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<sup>43</sup> Brackney, 177.

the National Baptist Convention USA. The Convention boasts a current membership of 7.5 million Black Baptists.<sup>44</sup>

The uniqueness of the African American Baptist church is embodied in the proclivity towards an ecstatic religious experience that inspires their worship and is rooted in their African culture. Herein lies the unique multifaith essence of the Black Baptist denomination in that the importance of the felt presence of the Holy Spirit through shouting and spiritual possession relates to a similar importance placed on an Africanism of spirit possession that dates back to the religions of West Africa practiced before the North Atlantic slave trade. The worship of the Separate Baptist easily meshed with the practices of traditional African spirituality and provides for an even greater multifaith practicum. Enslaved Africans found Baptist services appealing because the emphasis on spiritual conversion translated well to the African belief in the dynamic world of the spirit. The Baptist movement was successful in connecting an African past with a North American present.<sup>45</sup> Therefore a Black Baptist denomination has a liturgy illustrated by shouting, boisterous singing, responses to exhortation and prophesy. However, the central particularism of the Black Baptist Church is social justice, or the lack thereof, which is felt and upheld among Black Baptists. Dr. Brackney states:

Being deprived of freedom and basic needs, living in a color-bound society, and being the targets of laws that codified segregation and discrimination, Black Baptist have cried out from their pulpits with words of Scripture to identify God's role among the oppressed. With the Bible as its foundation and social justice as its passion, the Black Baptist denomination organized secular social agencies like the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the Rainbow/PUSH Coalition to address an institutionally unjust society.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Brackney, 184.

<sup>45</sup> Battle, *Black Church in America*, 61.

<sup>46</sup> Brackney, *Baptists in North America*, 196.

The notion of a traditional Black Baptist church as defined by Michael Battle, Associate professor of Theology at Virginia Theological Seminary, is “a church that has totally renounced authentically African Heritage worship in order to adopt a White European worship genre to acquiesce into the dominant culture.”<sup>47</sup> Similarly members of the Mount Calvary Baptist Church of Springfield, Massachusetts consider their church to be a “Traditional Black Baptist Church” because of its particular worship genre that is resplendent with choral anthems for the introit accompanied by the massively striking sound of the historic pipe organ, as opposed to a Reverend James Cleveland brand gospel accompanied by the Hammond B-52 organ. Moreover they have identified the litanies, lectionary, liturgical color calendar, and the stoicism of the parishioners as closely resembling a White European worship experience, all of which classifies them as a traditional Black Baptist Church. Notwithstanding, these representative members upheld the Blackness of the Baptist tradition through Mount Calvary’s exacting dynamic and corporate worship experience. Battle states that this type of dynamic worship “demonstrates that the meaning of human life in the Black Church flows from the community to the person, whereas in White America there is often an inverse flow of meaning originating in the individual that only sometimes leads to community.”<sup>48</sup> Again, these representative members have described their fellow worshippers as highly educated commuters who are mostly generationally naturalized into Mount Calvary, which serves as a vehicle to keep them connected to the Black community that reared them. Therefore,

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<sup>47</sup> Battle, *Black Church in America*, 91.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 66.

they respond more positively to a clearly documented, regimented liturgy for worship opposed to a free moving worship format that would leave them vulnerable to emotional spirituality, which they find unintelligible.

The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., a prolific Baptist Preacher and Civil Rights leader truly touched the belly barometer of the traditional Black Baptist church, seeking its transformation, in his sermon referencing Luke 11:5-6 titled, “A Knock at Midnight” in which he speaks of three types of Black churches. The first is one that is socially conscious as it seeks to help community by “feeding the midnight stranger.” Another has minimized worship to entertainment. The last represents the more traditional Black church that has developed a class system and boasts of its dignity, its membership of professional people and its exclusiveness. In such a church, the worship is cold and meaningless, and the music dull and uninspiring. Further, if the Pastor speaks too much about Christ, the members feel indignity. The same are absolutely mortified if the choir sways, claps, and “over- rhythms” a traditional protestant hymn believing it an affront to their class status.<sup>49</sup> Black theologian, J. Deotis Roberts, Founder/President of the J. Deotis Roberts Research Library and Institute, provides clarity to the description of a traditional Black Baptist church based on the issues of accommodation and assimilation:

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<sup>49</sup> Battle, *Black Church in America*, 91



Blacks who copy the religion of the White mainstream because they have really arrived at a measure of success or make believe that they have done so have no healing provisions built into their church life. They are less emotional and are more consciously sophisticated in their worship than Whites of the same denomination. The minister is to be well educated and extremely polished, but they dare not extend morning worship for more than an hour. They must not introduce any Africanisms into the service- “gospels” and “spirituals” are out. Anthems are in. The preacher must not get carried away with the message. They must present a clear, concise, logical and cohesive message. Not only must the minister steer clear of emotion in manner of delivery; they must not belabor the cause of social justice in the message.<sup>50</sup>

The challenge to restore the Mount Calvary Baptist Church to its Multifaith identity, by honoring African worship traditions, is endured in the struggle of the parishioners to relocate themselves culturally from a traditional Eurocentric liturgy that has dislocated them from their African cultural worship practices. The authentic and unmasked particularism inherent in Black worship is where the symbols and ritual dramas of Black life are actualized, cultivated, and ceremonialized. Molefi Asante, a pioneer in the Afrocentric movement, said that “it is within the veil of the Black Baptist church that African Americans have created, interpreted, articulated, and preserved the cultural and spiritual traditions of both African American people and their African ancestors.”<sup>51</sup> Therefore the Black Baptist Church must be cognizant of the fact that it remains the cultural and spiritual core that calls them back to the core of their faith. An alternative liturgy, like the Sankofa Liturgy Model would restore Mount Calvary to its African multifaith identity; further empowering parishioners to realize their greater human potential, both as individuals and as community.

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<sup>50</sup> J. Deotis Roberts, *Liberation and Reconciliation: A Black Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971).

<sup>51</sup> Dudley, McDuffie, and Stewart. *Sankofa*, X

## CHAPTER 3 PREPARING FOR TRANSFORMATION

### **Benefits of Being New**

Granted, it is beneficial to be in a new pastoral position as it relates to facilitating the process of transformative change for a traditional Black Baptist Church such as Mount Calvary, particularly when the church operated without a pastor for three long years. Naturally the parishioners were excited, vulnerable and even cautious as they received their new pastor, based solely on curricula vitae, two interviews and two preaching trials. Trust would grow over time, but the anxiety towards something new was stellar at best. American Theologian, Dr. Jonathan Edwards suggest that “pastors of churches, beyond others, must love the church, as Christ her true bridegroom hath loved her, and to imitate Christ in the care and tender concern for her welfare, earnestly promoting this paradigm at every opportunity.”<sup>52</sup>

### **Transforming**

Indeed being in a new pastorate provides a window of opportunity to form coalitions with the faith communities that are willing participants in the process of their transformation. It is crucial, however, for the pastor, and in this case, the project principal, to be the lead embracer of this transformation. Initially, this project was

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<sup>52</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “The Church Marriage to Her Sons and to Her God (sermon),” *The Relationship Between A Pastor & His People, Thoughts & Actions* [thoughtsactions.wordpress.com/.../the-relationship-between-a-pastor-his-people](https://thoughtsactions.wordpress.com/.../the-relationship-between-a-pastor-his-people).

designed to change others, but in fact, I have been transformed. Hence, to transform a gathering through worship requires that the pastor be the most willing participant towards change by identifying the desperation and lack inside him or herself. This congregational transformation really represents, in the words of Dr. Lester Ruiz in his essay, “the creation and nurture of the fundamentally new which is also fundamentally better, without which, it is of no significance. Transformation should not be stagnant nor complacent but constantly moving via improvisation, passion, and struggle.”<sup>53</sup> This transformation type via the physiological movement of the church is similar to the early church depicted in Acts 2: 46 (KJV) where these newly baptized converts went from “house to house” representing a worshipful gathering outside of the temple. Indeed this is a radical precipice. Transformation that yields the “fundamentally better” requires acts of radical resistance to the dominant or populace stance. Yet transformation of a church through modification of the prescribed liturgy format, even in lieu of radical resistance to the existing liturgical structure, would fail miserably without tempered consideration and balance of the liturgical interpretation of those we seek to transition into the “fundamentally better” or transform into a new liturgy model. Dr. Lester Ruiz, in his aforementioned essay, expounds Hans-Georg Gadamer’s notion that the interpretive act aspires to the transformation of play into structure. An example of this “transformation of play into structure” consist of representative number of parishioners exploring and developing the “fundamentally better” via the Sankofa Liturgy model (play) that will ultimately serve as the new liturgy of the Mount Calvary Baptist Church (structure). All this, however, remains contingent upon the parishioners’ individual hermeneutic. Ruiz

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<sup>53</sup> Edwin J. Ruiz, “Dispora, Empire, Solidarity: Hope and the (Marginalized) Subaltern as Rupture(s) and Repetition(s),” [http:// www.topik2007.org/Peace\\_Forum/12.4\\_Diaspora,\\_Empire ,\\_Solidarity.pdf](http://www.topik2007.org/Peace_Forum/12.4_Diaspora,_Empire,_Solidarity.pdf). D.MIN. Course Syllabus

states that “interpretive acts guide, if not direct, transformation. They can also overcome that transformation; in this case, the hope of the “fundamentally better” becomes the fundamentally worst as the failure to transform will define this Black church as a Eurocentric imposter that ignores the value and growth inherent in their multifaith identity.”<sup>54</sup>

Like the Pastor, the gathering must also become introspective, developing their own hermeneutic in which to understand their present form in order to interpret the “fundamentally better,” or even the need for such. Devoid of this process, transformation is unintelligible, meaningless and powerless to alter the present form. Theoretically the need here is to alter specific forms that negate movement through transformation, like the tradition of the Black Baptist Church which has developed into an institutionalized structure that hinders the growth of its parishioners towards the “fundamentally better”. Subsequently relegating this structured form to the defeatist euphemism of, “it is what it is”. The fact remains that people change at different rates and each hermeneutic, although not unique, is diverse. Yet we seek to thread the hermeneutic similarity among the parishioners which through this pluralism or mosaic the Sankofa Liturgy Model is birthed.

### **Transforming from Who We Are to Where We’re Going**

As I said earlier, I began this journey seeking to change others, when in fact I, and others, have moved into a realm of transformation that is progressing towards the “fundamentally better”. My hermeneutic position at the start of this project began with

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<sup>54</sup> Ruiz, *Diaspora, Empire, Solidarity*.

my religious history and tradition.<sup>55</sup> Whereas I was reared in an even more traditional Black Baptist Church than Mount Calvary, my interpretation of the sacred text, based on my religious upbringing, burgeons from oppression that seeks liberation via the ekklesia. Again, religious history and tradition was conjoined in the ideology of the Black Baptist Church under the auspices of the National Baptist Convention USA; more specifically, the local Black Baptist Church located in Mount Vernon, New York. Mount Vernon was a city of four square miles, packed with over one hundred other religious meeting spaces, including churches, synagogues and a mosque; all of which had populations that were about seventy-five percent Black. I concur with Anthony B. Pinn's characterization of the Black Church in his work, *The Black in the Post Civil Rights Era*, where he states that "the church for me has been the best hope for it provides a safe space on which to rise, compete and work on both the spiritual and material standing." Hence, interpretation of the sacred text was formed, derived, adjusted and altered for the ultimate liberation of my race and culture. My hermeneutic towards a working theology is encapsulated in the ministry of "the Man with the Unclean Spirit." The unclean spirit that tormented the Gadarene Demoniak, as recorded in the fifth chapter of Mark's Gospel, was not simply the work of a lone imp, but the result of a hegemonic demon, evidenced by a community that facilitated his residency in the tomb, and an imperial government that oppressed the community. The demoniac lived in exile from his oppressed community who often attempted to bind him; oppression yields oppression. Hence my working theology is the implementation of strategic ministry to the oppressed that will guide them towards self-sufficiency, leading healthy and productive lives. This oppression that is resulting from a plethora of social ills, including drug abuse, people living with HIV/AIDS,

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<sup>55</sup> Appendix 3 *My Hermeneutic Inventory*

incarceration and homelessness, just to name a few. Indeed my working theology is the same as my formal theology, although it is not widely accepted among my associates and continues to be an issue with some of the old guard present in the church I pastor. There are an increasing number of men who had been incarcerated joining the church; hence, they wear jeans that sag instead of a suit and tie. In addition, there are other contemporary parishioners with unusual piercings and tattoos. This is quite uncomfortable because the disposition of the noisy old guard, albeit “Seasoned Saints,” often places me into a dual role of advocate and apologist, the unappreciated component of my working theology.

My hermeneutic regarding the notion of social class begins with me being grateful that I was reared in a strong middle class background. Although what I thought was middle class, in reality, may have been poor, if defined by my parents’ wages. Still I was raised with mainstreamed middle class values including that I would achieve more than my parents by graduating college and ultimately realize the “American Dream”. However, the white picket fence, a gorgeous wife, 2.5 children, two cars and a great career has not capitulated patronization towards those who were not as blessed. I was, and continue to be, intrigued with the plight of the underprivileged and the underserved, and their relationship with the dominant elite class that holds them down. Hence interpretation, and sometimes even manipulation, of the text towards freeing and edifying the proposed underclass, devoid of a prosperity Gospel discourse, has been the intent. More importantly, life crises, and the established issues they create, always impact my social location, yielding a situational evolving hermeneutic. Generally speaking, I have come to realize that there are many issues that can isolate individuals from the

mainstream, forcing them to live in dank places because of guilt, shame and trauma. The lasting effect on my hermeneutical interpretation has been that I had to have life crises in order to minister (share God) with someone at the point of their need. The definitive need that we (the project site/support team) shared was to be culturally relevant in our worship through the Sankofa Liturgy Model. Hence, now we are all close to the same page, if you will, poised to transform together through liturgy to an expectation of what could be the “fundamentally better”.

Assuredly the faith and the belief of the individual team members is crucial for understanding the dynamic of their specific liturgical hermeneutic in order for me to value their contribution to this project. Additionally, the faith and belief of the team also paves the path for my evolving hermeneutic. I have been transformed.

### **Transformable Faith and Belief**

Faith and belief has often been interpreted as one and the same; however, a distinction should be made between the two. Protestant philosopher/theologian Paul Tillich, in his writing *Dynamics of Faith*, concludes that faith is real in every period of history. Moreover faith can be an actual distortion of humanity’s true nature, which is why many people reject faith tradition. Tillich states that “faith is not a phenomenon in the personal life of humans for it manifests and is hidden both at the same time – it is religious and transcends religion, universal and concrete, infinitely variable and always the same.”<sup>56</sup> Yet Tillich proposes that “any denial of faith is an actual expression of faith.”<sup>57</sup> The missing component here is the interaction between faith and belief. After

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<sup>56</sup> Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper, 1958), 146-147.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

reading Wilfred Cantwell Smith's book, *Faith and Belief*, the interaction of faith and belief; ironic, ambiguous and sometimes gray as it seems, belief can be prerequisite to faith, can pre or post date faith, can posit alongside of faith, and yet gratefully can run independently of faith with profound difference.<sup>58</sup> In the "Buddhist Instance", the equation negotiated here is faith, then belief, equals grounding. Faith initiates the practice of peaceful existence in tandem with a deficit-based notion of "suffering." Again, "it is what it is"; faith is bartering through the chaos, whereas, belief is the expectation towards peace, "nirvana" – a transcendental experience – through which frequent practice, becomes fermented or "grounded".<sup>59</sup> Although the western-world view holds that belief is opinion, of which is not necessarily supportive or conducive to a specific faith practice, regrettably this view facilitates a condescending posture towards the "other", and relegates this grounding to true ignorance. Indeed, this western-world viewer believes in "one, true, living" God; this is constitutive of a strong opinion.

Notwithstanding, there is an affinity towards the independent functioning between "faith" and "belief". With that said, the free moving, unrestrictive practice of faith, either theistic or anti-theistic, devoid of any suggested object, requires a real move of the heart which closely resembles the concept of *sraddha*. Faith moves. Belief is stagnant. Hence to be complacent in belief is to edge the sovereignty of God, negate the effective and creative flow of multifaith engagement, and immobilizes faith. Again, faith must move and act. Smith reports that in Eastern Indian tradition "anything done without faith is a waste."<sup>60</sup> This *sraddha* is "placing of one's heart"—tuning one's desires—no matter

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<sup>58</sup> Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Faith and Belief* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979).

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.



what. The action of this Hindu notion of this moving faith's is evidenced by lifestyle-using intentional good behavior/ best practices. Conversely speaking, sraddha is not social discomfort, "murmuring nor complaining", but indeed a comfort zone; it's where the heart is. Smith states that credo is not "I believe" and, "faith is not belief"; the two are not just independent but disconnected. Literally credo means: "I place my heart", which certainly ascribes more to faith than belief, particularly in the Hindu practice of sraddha.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Smith, *Faith and Belief*.

## CHAPTER 4 IMPLEMENTATION

### **Let's Go Back**

Although the time restraints would not allow for each team member to complete an exhaustive hermeneutic inventory similar to mine, each participant explored their own religious interpretation through the initial awareness building workshop titled, *Let's Go Back*.<sup>62</sup> At the onset, the participants were given a pre-discussion questionnaire to examine and then were asked to share their theological interpretations. From this, we discovered that the majority of both the support and the site team were naturalized into the Mount Calvary Baptist Church. Specifically, they were raised in the surrounding community, the old North End of Springfield, Massachusetts; and for the most part, their families had been attending Mount Calvary since its inception. Needless to say, most of them were born and raised in the Mount Calvary Baptist Church and were totally embedded in a religiosity that is immersed in its Eurocentric Liturgy. Generally speaking, their hermeneutic regarding religious history and tradition was contingent upon whoever the pastoral ministry was at any given time.<sup>63</sup> For example, one pastor discouraged illicit emotionalism during worship services, preferring a more conservative form of worship. Still another pastor was a vanguard for ensuring that the Sunday school overflowed with children, but did not encourage adult Bible study attendance. Hence the

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<sup>62</sup> Appendix 4

<sup>63</sup> Appendix 5

tradition was that of a Sunday worship gathering where people came because they were supposed to attend church on Sunday. In some cases, a comprehensive, weekly ministry was abnormal to them because there existed profound disconnects between Sunday Morning and their daily lives.

Assuredly, we adopted the Hindu practice of *sraddha* as our proverbial credo in action that involved “placing our hearts” around revamping the traditional liturgy of the Mount Calvary Baptist Church. The first goal was to raise the awareness of the multifaith identity and the African Heritage exhibited in the worship practices/liturgy of Mount Calvary by first exploring the formation of the Black Baptist Church, emphasizing the multifaith component of African liturgical genre that survived the Middle Passage. Through research, the team explored the history of the African American Baptist Church movement and the development of its liturgy from a multifaceted, multifaith indigenous African beginning. First, they examined the evolutionary aspects of their own liturgy, which revealed a subsequent multifaith African heritage. They were assisted in making inferences from their own liturgical legacy, tracing the history of specific worship components that have made their liturgical expression unique from other Black Baptist Churches in the Greater Springfield area. It is important to note here that an overwhelming percentage of Mount Calvary’s membership have for two generations been connected to Mount Calvary. Therefore many of the families in the church can trace the evolvement of Mount Calvary’s liturgy for most of the church’s ninety-year history. Their unique liturgical features, such as the “Children’s Call”, the parishioners holding hands as they gather at “Altar Call”, the style and order of the procession into worship, and the intermittent episodes of “shouting” during the corporate worship, were

expounded on by the team. This assisted in formulating a profound introduction to the Black Baptist Church liturgy, along with the uniqueness of their very own Baptist liturgy and its relationship to the traditional African worship practices.

### **Mount Calvary's Traditional Liturgy**

An additional benefit in being in a new pastoral assignment was that the team was able to teach me the history of their unique form of liturgy. For example, the “Children’s Call” component was started by Mount Calvary’s sixth pastor in 1974 to include the children in the worship experience. Prior to the beloved “Children’s Call”, the old adage rang true for this congregation, “children are to be seen and not heard.” In the past, this congregation minimized the relevance of children in the worship experience, as well as the growth of the faith community, by keeping younger children, ages birth to nine years, in the fellowship hall (located in the basement), while older children sat in the balcony. Sunday morning worship was considered an adult experience. Even though the children were thought to be cute, they were only seriously considered during the Sunday school hour, and for Easter and Christmas pageants/programs. A site team member discussed how the adults would frown out of irritability when an infant would cry, and one of the church ushers would ask the parent to remove the child from the service. Thus, the implementation of the Children’s Call during the liturgy allowed child worshippers to participate in this mature service by gathering at the altar to hear a Christian message narrated by one of their own. Burgeoning from this, the “Youth Church” began to flourish by having its own choir, liturgical dance ministry and theatre group. Prior to the implementation of the Children’s Call, the church’s ministry to children was quite a contradiction. Case in point, per church by-laws, adult members were permitted to join

the church by letter, reinstatement or baptism simultaneously, and baptism was offered to children as young as five years; but, the children were not considered to be participants in the worship, save eating the bread and drinking the juice during the Lord's Supper ordinance, until the Children's Call.

A stereotype of a traditional Black Baptist Church like Mount Calvary is the parishioner's aptitude toward individualized worship with in a corporate gathering. Stiff, stoic, grand, disconnected and impersonal as they could be on Sunday morning, yet united community is observed during the altar prayer component of their liturgy. This is the pivotal moment when the entire congregation, who actually do not come close to the altar, but instead form a circle around the sanctuary, holding hands as the pastor prays for the sick and shut-in members, and congregational atonement. At this precise moment, stoic faces are relieved of their wrinkles bartering for a more penitent expression in effort to posture humility. Immediately following the end of the altar prayer, usually signified by the pastor saying "In the name of Jesus...Amen", these parishioners do not simply return to their seats, but they return their faces and actions to stiff and stoic as if the altar prayer was devoid of any inspiration or comfort. Oddly enough the altar prayer is not considered the corporate prayer. The corporate prayer is the second audible prayer during the worship that is usually offered by one of the Deacons of the church. For the most part, this prayer demonstrates the level of ability of the Deacon. For example, if the Deacon prays using the traditional Black Baptist clichés, such as "thank you Lord for waking me up this morning...starting me on my way...clothed and in my right mind....with a reasonable portion of health," then the Deacon is considered to be a great

Deacon. Moreover, when the Deacon assigned to pray starts off with a song, he is indeed considered a winner.

The order of the processional into worship at Mount Calvary varied over its ninety years based upon the pastor's preference; some pastor's would process into worship before the choir, others after the choir, and still others did not process into worship at all, opting to enter through a side door near the pulpit area and simply sit in the rostrum. The project team defined the "order of procession" component of their current liturgy as the entrance of the singers into worship, which has had a wide variance of style based on the particular pastoral leadership. The more conservative pastors wanted the choir to "perform" a musical introit before the walk-in; while less conservative pastors would allow the choir to march in rhythmic tempo to a rousing gospel song like "We've Come This Far by Faith." The notion of a sacred entrance into worship was often negated by the choir, whose attempts at a choreographed march proved to be a distraction, moving the entrance from the sacred to the silly. In fact, the project team mused at Sister "Jones" who could never sing, sway and march successfully.

Sporadic instances of spiritual manifestations, such as shouts, were quite trying for this traditional Black Baptist Church. The rationale regarding shouting for these parishioners concluded that the individual committed a major sin, or they were facing difficult changes, or they were misplaced worshippers who should seek a storefront church experience, or they were just holier than everyone else. Essentially, this traditional Black Baptist Church snubbed their noses at this type of outburst, and refused to be associated with such acts. Again, the objective for the Project Team was to make

inferences by identifying the similarities of their liturgy with some traditional African worship practices.

### **Awareness Raising Towards Multifaith**

Exploring some traditional worship tenets of West Africa practiced prior to the North Atlantic slave trade was crucial for demonstrating the multifaith identity of the Mount Calvary Baptist Church. Our awareness was raised through the fact that the religious beliefs and ceremonies were similar among West Africans. West African religions comprised three major categories of supernatural phenomena that interact with each other and with humankind: (a) a creator god remote from everyday life, (b) spirits believed to live in nature, and (c) ancestors who could intercede with other spirits on behalf the community.<sup>64</sup> West African traditional religion made no distinction between the sacred and the secular. All of life, not part, was considered sacred. Nor was there any sense of division between this life and the afterlife; they believed all life was part of a continuum in which both the living and dead took part. The cosmological idea of traditional African religions indeed ascribed to one supreme God who is known by various local names, yet the lesser deities derive their power from God as they function much like angels in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Next to the lesser deities are the ancestral spirits representing the souls of forefathers/foremothers, perpetuating the idea that Africans are closer to God during death. Kofi Johnson explains this notion in his paper, "Understanding African Traditional Religion":

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<sup>64</sup> Lindsay, *West African Kingdoms*.

In African traditional religions there is no death in the sense of radical separation from either family or the tribal community. Rather, Africans believe that life is eternal and that its motion is not linear but cyclical...they are convinced that the temporal movement of human life is continuous cyclical process from the realm of the spirit to that history...to speak of such process as death is a misnomer. Rather, departure from physical life marks a transition from the state of mortality to that of ancestral immortality.<sup>65</sup>

Presenting some traditional African worship tenets to Mount Calvary, in attempt to raise awareness towards their own multifaith identity, was challenging because the more vocal members of the project team had already formulated negative stereotypes which had formed their hermeneutic. This was powerfully evident when they were afforded the opportunity to observe a Yoruba and Vodoun worship gathering, which this vocal remnant strongly resisted. Therefore, they required re-teaching and redirection by acknowledging the stunning, albeit, western-world viewed misconceptions of traditional African religions. The fact remains that most tradition African religions believe in the existence of one God. Perhaps the confusion around the lesser, Ancestral deities and even the animist practices cause them to appear to be polytheistic. But this is not true. Traditional African religions do not worship many gods, nor do they worship trees and rocks, or the ancestors; it is true that they worship one God and they reverence the one God. Moreover, like the angels in the Judeo-Christian tradition, the lesser deities and the ancestors serve as intermediaries between God and humanity. Additionally their perceived powers are limited to the performance of specific functions assigned to them by the supreme God. Another issue in this project's attempt to thread traditional African worship with Mount Calvary's present worship practices was the team's almost distracting fascination with the mystical powers of traditional African religion. These

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<sup>65</sup> Kofi Johnson, "Understanding African Traditional Religion." Paper; Fayetteville State University, [http://organizations.uncfsu.edu/ncrsa/.../johnson\\_understanding.htm](http://organizations.uncfsu.edu/ncrsa/.../johnson_understanding.htm) .



African mystical agents include witchcraft, magic and sorcery. Kofi Johnson explains that witchcraft is used in a broad sense in African religiosity to mean the harmful use of mystical power in all its different manifestations:

A witch enables her to perform supernatural powers in consequence of forming a league with the devil or evil spirits, and through such an evil alliance and co-operation the possession of craft which enables her to perform supernatural acts which, in most cases, are destructive.<sup>66</sup>

At first the project team's fascination with these mystical powers inherent in African spirituality was regaled as a condescending form of entertainment of a seemingly primitive people, similar to past forms of minstrel entertainment in which American White people donned Black face and sang "mammy" tunes. This continual disgrace had a lasting effect on African American culture through the film market perpetrated by Hollywood that translated into the shame and embarrassment that is characteristic of a traditional Black Baptist church like Mount Calvary. To dig through this mire of western world view that has dangerously negotiated this particular traditional Black Baptist Church's embrace of their own multifaith identity presupposes that the project team deciphers and scoops the inherent mystical powers prevalent in their own community. Unlike traditional African religions, this traditional Black Baptist Church maintains dual cultural identities; one is religious and the other is worldly, but they function as parallel entities, running concurrently. For example, when faith healing through prayer has not been realized immediately then "root workers" – a representative number of underground prayer warriors per se – are sought. In fact, root workers, fortune tellers, spiritual remedies and the notion of "luck" are prevalent commodities in the Black religious

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<sup>66</sup> Johnson, *Understanding African Traditional Religion*.

community. These mystical powers are real to some of Mount Calvary's parishioners, not simply because it serves as an alternative method to relieve a desperate situation, but it is believed to be more expedient than the religious act of waiting for God to work. These types of lengthy discussions regarding the misconceptions of traditional African religions, in addition to acknowledging misconceptions of their own forms of religious culture, facilitated our exploration of indigenous African religions and West African spirituality in a balanced and intelligent way, even with biases. We discovered through these discussions that a bias unaddressed would constitute the prejudicial if not validated in the rubric of a substantial hermeneutic that can foster respect for a formidable multifaith ethic. Thus we were propelled forward with respect as we (the project team and I) observed the worship genres of Voudoun/Voodoo, Yoruba, Spiritual Baptists, and Islam to develop the Sankofa Liturgy Model.

## CHAPTER 5 CREATING THE SANKOFA LITURGY

The project team experienced several forms of traditional African worship genres in selecting core components to be included in the Sankofa liturgy. More specifically, connections and similarities had to be construed between their own liturgy and that of some traditional African worship that met the general consensus of the team before selected item could be constructed and included in the Sankofa model. Initially the project team had to understand conjointly that indigenous African religions are not limited to their belief in a supreme God or ritual acts of worship, but are representative of concepts of ethnic identity, language and culture. Traditional African religions affect all aspects of their lives, from farming to hunting, from travel to courtship, seeking to answer the perpetual, such as the meaning of humanity, the meaning of life, the meaning of evil, the meaning of suffering and the relationship between human, spirit and the environment. Conceptually these ideas vary among the indigenous religions of Africa so often grayed because of an oral, handed-down tradition; hence, the definitive yield to an inference of integrity as the project team formats the Sankofa Liturgy. More importantly is the fact that indigenous African beliefs are practiced in the way people live their everyday lives, from the food they eat, or not, clothing, education, marriage, work, birth

and death. Their religious ceremonies, of which we uncover liturgy, are not restricted to a prescribed Sabbath or Holy Days, but can occur on any day.<sup>67</sup>

It is important to note that the Sankofa Liturgy Model is a modified version of what was authentically practiced by traditional African worshippers balanced with what a congregation such as Mount Calvary Baptist would be willing to participate in. The fact, for most of Calvary's parishioners, like everyone else, transformation must be incremental or it could devastate its subjects and fail. Therefore being obligated to tread lightly, we found assistance in a group study of Will Coleman's essay, "Amen and Ashe: African American Protestant Worship and Its West African Ancestor." Coleman's essay clearly establishes the similarities between "expressions of ecstatic African American liturgy and its foundation within the West African Yoruba tradition."<sup>68</sup> At first look, it seems as if the two liturgies would be extremely different based on the different geographical histories of the two cultures and the varied religious symbols of each.

Coleman provides revelation with the following observation:

African American Protestantism is iconoclastic and places a strong emphasis of Jesus as the exclusive focus of salvation. Whereas West African Yoruba religion incorporates what seems to be a pantheon of images and deities into its practices.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Exploring Africa, "Unit Three: Studying Africa through the Humanities, Indigenous African Religions: Explore" Exploring Africa <http://exploringafrica.matrix.msu.edu/students/.../activity2.php>.

<sup>68</sup> Will Coleman, "'Amen' and 'Ashe': African American Protestant Worship and Its West African Ancestor". *Cross Currents* 52 (2002): 158.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

## **Multifaith Yoruba Connection**

The challenge for the project team required taking a closer glance at the two respective liturgies to reveal an affinity that was not destroyed by the Middle Passage, North American enslavement or acquiescence. There is indeed a real ancestral legacy in contemporary African American worship.<sup>70</sup> The majority of African Americans brought to the United States as enslaved Africans were descendents of West Africa from Dahomey, Yoruba, Ibo and the Congo nations who merged their belief systems derived from Yoruba into their maiden sacred cosmology practiced in the Americas. These belief systems clandestinely merged and evolved through poignant similarities as cultural memory and newly learned beliefs were joined.

The Yoruba religious tradition believes that the world was created by one god that represents both genders. This God, named Olodumare, reigns supreme as “owner of heaven.”<sup>71</sup> Olodumare delegates daily earthly operations to intermediate spirits, called Orishas that permeate and animate everything in the universe as they represent the extraordinary attributes and consciousness of Olodumare. Coleman adds that in the language of Yoruba, the relationship between Olodumare, Orisha and the human believer is called Ashe, an all pervasive spiritual energy. “Ashe” is also translated as “so be it,” which Coleman compares to the Black Baptist use of “Amen”, which means “it is well” or “it is so.”<sup>72</sup> Arguably, the use of “Amen” in the Black Baptist tradition has evolved into a quick response to a specific stimulus during church worship which has transitioned

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<sup>70</sup> Coleman, “‘Amen’ and ‘Ashe’”, 158.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

the phraseology from the religious sacred to a cultural misnomer with little to no relevance. Comparable liturgy component is a stretch. In the case of Mount Calvary, using “Amen”, unlike “Ashe’ is a response to overt spiritual energy inspired during the worship. Comparably, however, is the use of ancestral spirits during worship. The sacred cosmos in the Yoruba tradition include tribal spirits representative of the dead who were once historical figures that left a positive impact on the universe. Again, the Yoruba religion does not worship the ancestors, they simply reverence them. Thus a comparative reference point is deliverable in the way a traditional Black Baptist celebrates and reverences great historical figures such as Martin Luther King, Malcolm X and Harriet Tubman. Granted, Black Baptists do not equate African American historical figures to ancestors. Noteworthy, however, is the fact that Black people who have made extraordinary contribution to social justice are lauded for their great accomplishments comparable to religio-cultural veneration experience of the ancestral spirits in the Yoruba tradition.

The project team was observed to be obscured through a lens of bias in attempting to ascertain what a traditional African worship looks like liturgically.. This was not necessarily a negative bias, but certainly a reality of their social location which formulates a specific hermeneutic that evolved from an African American traditional Baptist context that has been disconnected from an authentic African worship heritage. With this matrix in mind, the Babalawo position in the Yoruba religion is compared to pastor, so is a priest in Vodoun, and so is an Imam in Islam. Also comparable is the Baptist Worship leader to a West African tribal Griot. The project team exhibited a strong fascination with the highly visible participants in traditional African worship such

as the Griot. The West African Griot is a troubadour, the counterpart of the medieval European minstrel. They were considered a living archive of speech and song who maintain oral traditions, both local and epic. They were taught by their elders and were trained over many years to learn the enormous quantity of traditional songs and the mastery of melody and rhythm.<sup>73</sup> There could not be a corporate worship gathering without the use of the Griot that prepares the gathering for worship and invokes the presence of the spirits. Several members of the project team went to Brooklyn Academy of Music to participate in an African Festival which included dance, memorials, all lead by a traditional Griot. This is very similar to the worship leader at the Mount Calvary Baptist Church, who inspires the gathering to worship God as they cajole the people via worship singing and praise to “get into the presence of God”. Again, Will Coleman’s writing in the essay “Amen and Ashe: African American Protestant Worship and its West African Ancestor” supports the idea of a multifaith identity of a traditional Black Baptist Church’s liturgy through the fact that the Yoruba liturgy, its ritual practices, is the most wide spread format of the traditional West African religions. These syncretized components of their liturgy have been combined with other West African traditions, Native American beliefs, and Euro-centric Christian beliefs which are found in African Americans today in the following religions: Santeria, Candomble, Umbanda, and Macumba, Vodoun, Lucumi and Spiritual Baptist and Black Baptist religions. Traditional African religions practiced many ritual ceremonies that followed a specific liturgical format depending upon their function. There are rituals that are communal

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<sup>73</sup> Oralea Howard. “African Griots,” [influx.uoregon.edu/2001/stories/aliou/.../griots.html](http://influx.uoregon.edu/2001/stories/aliou/.../griots.html) (accessed October 12, 2009).

based on annual seasons and others that are private. They both play a dominant religious and social function in African society. However, the project team chose worship gatherings that were not necessarily annual celebrations but ones that represented normal communal worship gatherings that would closely resemble their main weekly worship gatherings that take place on Sundays. The project team, through an exhaustive process of elimination, decided to recreate the following worship components to present for the Sankofa Liturgy Model: the processional, prayer forms, and shouting. Certainly our expectation is for the project team to educate the congregation at-large subsequently facilitating Mount Calvary's restoration to its multifaith identity through worship. However, the team felt that too much African historical theological references regarding the liturgical components they had chosen would be over the top, per se, for their congregation who would probably respond more positively to their sensual perceptions being tickled. In other words, the Sankofa liturgy would promote more enthusiasm if it would be presented in the form of an artistic production with congregational participation. The more theological implications inherent in the misconceived notions that West African religions are polytheistic will be compared to the formidable Trinitarian doctrine used in Black Baptist worship as it was uncovered by the project team in the following chapter. The fact that the project team researched the meanings of the proposed liturgical items for presentation, and their choice to present it as an art form, in no way points to the limited intellectual capacity of the Black Baptist Church, nor a particular penchant for entertainment, but is methodological. More specifically it represents the impartation of a lost historical heritage into a venue, like theatre which



would be widely appreciated and accepted by the congregation at-large. Restoration through what is transformative is indeed incremental.

### **Sankofa Liturgy Model**

The Sankofa Liturgy begins with the processional of the gathering into worship. Some dimensions of West African Liturgy, as well, include the processional into worship. In the Yoruba religion, the worship ceremony begins with the participants entering the Ile and greeting the Babalawo, along with the other priest and priestesses, and one another. A more appealing processional into worship that closely resembles the Black Baptist liturgy is that of the Spiritual Baptist denomination. Practiced mostly in urban centers in the United States, their processional is lengthy, rhythmic and includes the entire worship gathering. The origins and early development of the Spiritual and Shouter Baptist religion are not well known, but the consensus is that the religion developed among the people of African descent during the nineteenth century. It is a unique religion, comprising elements of both Protestant Christianity and African doctrines and rituals. They were also called Shouter Baptist because of their tendency to shout, clap and sing loudly during their religious services.<sup>74</sup> Indeed their procession into worship was a rowdy celebration which the project team sought to implement coupled with the worshipful greetings with fellow worshippers to reenact the aforementioned Yoruba tradition of entering into worship. For Mount Calvary, the procession into worship includes “marching” music as the Choir step proceeds forward to the choir loft in rhythmic formation that is lively and engaging. The pastor follows the choir in a solemn

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<sup>74</sup> Spiritual/Shouter Baptist Liberation Day, “Shoutin', Gettin' Happy, Catchin' Holy Ghost!” <http://library2.nalis.gov.tt/Default.aspx?tabid=174>

walk and shakes hands with the Deacons who are sitting on the first pew. Then the pastor functions like an African Griot as they lead the congregation into a singing a song purposed to invoke the presence of God. This is followed by a sung meditative call to worship to the words of the Lord's Prayer as it is written in the Gospel of Matthew 6:9-13. The project team made comparable inferences between their form and the Yoruba greeting the Orisha shrines, along with the Babalawo calling the gathering to worship, then pouring the libation (pouring water on the ground) as they invoke the presence of God and the Orishas.<sup>75</sup> The processional presented in the Sankofa Liturgy Model included a spirited dance into worship of all those gathered like the Spiritual Baptist and the outpouring of libations, liken to the Yoruba religion as the Mount Calvary parishioners and community participants began to outpour their own spirits. Moreover the parishioners displayed a repentant emptying out of themselves so that they could be filled and saturated by the spirit of God. This occurred during this preliminary worship as they were lead into praise and song offerings. The notion here is that the singing and salutations rendered by worshipping participants would be so enticing that it would attract the presence of God.

Response to the presence of God is sometimes exhibited in the form of shouting. In some dimensions of African American Baptist Liturgy, shouting is induced under the influence of the Holy Ghost, a personage of the trinity. Shouting can be defined as a loud cry, loud outburst or uproar which is the practice in certain churches when the participants are overjoyed with the blessings of God. However shouting in the Black Baptist tradition is not merely rejoicing, rather, people shout out with an overwhelming

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<sup>75</sup> Coleman, "'Amen' and 'Ashe'", 161.

sense of grief and guilt towards their pending judgment from God.<sup>76</sup> The project team utilized shouting in their demonstration of prayer through contrived wailing and shaking as they remembered their loved ones during the “prayer circle” component of the Sankofa worship service. This prayer circle, at best, was derived from their research of the ring shout, an ecstatic dance ritual, first practiced by African slaves in the United States, in which worshippers move in a circle while shuffling their feet and clapping their hands. Despite the name, shouting aloud is not an essential part of the ritual, yet the project team led the congregation in shouting, particularly since the “shouting ring” was said to take place during a Christian prayer meeting or worship service. The origin of the ring shout is derived from African dance. The ritual may have originated among enslaved Muslims from West Africa as an imitation or tawaf, the mass procession around the Kaaba that is an essential part of the Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca.<sup>77</sup>

Indeed the project team was already enamored by shouting based on their experience as worshippers in a conservative church, where shouters and outburst of the sort are usually looked upon as renegades, weirdoes, and the perpetually guilty sinner. Therefore they chose to lessen the controversy shouting in church creates by presenting it through their belief of the sacred, solemn act of prayer which they combined with animism (relevant soil) and Ancestral recognition (roll call of the dead). This burgeoned from their definition of African traditional religion based on a reading from Dr. M. Darrol

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<sup>76</sup> David Reagan, “Shouting in Church,” Learn The Bible, <http://www.learnthebible.org/shouting-in-church.html> (accessed September 15, 2009); Dr. David R. Reagan serves as the Senior Evangelist for Lamb & Lion Ministries.

<sup>77</sup> [www.stretswing.com/histmain/z3ringshout](http://www.stretswing.com/histmain/z3ringshout)

Bryant, Professor of Religion at Waterloo University and Secretary General of the Inter-Religious Federation for World Peace, who said:

For African traditional religion there is a daily intercourse between the living and the dead, the ancestral spirits. The interaction with these realities is facilitated through prayers, rites, incantations, and libations. Many of these practices involve elements of nature such as water, foodstuffs, and animals in sacrificial rites.<sup>78</sup>

Hence the project team fused animism, ancestral reverence and shouting during the prayer component of the Sankofa liturgy. Whereas the project team defined prayer as corporate ceremonial act or experience in which the gathering communicates with God, they also used this activity to memorialize deceased Mount Calvary members who made an impact on their lives by reciting a role call. They also encouraged participants to remember their beginnings in North America by collecting the soil samples of their rearing, wrapping the soil in cherished cloth and composing a brief statement of reflection to perform during the act of prayer. Indeed they condensed the liturgy to demonstrate that worship can really take place in less than two hours. Usually Mount Calvary's liturgy last for about two and a half hours, and is the sole vehicle of religious expression for its parishioners. As we said earlier, there is an existing disconnect between the daily life and the Sunday worship experience for these traditional Black Baptists.

Restoration of Mount Calvary Baptist Church to its Multifaith Identity through a new form of liturgy developed by merging some African worship tenets with those of the assumed Eurocentric liturgical components presently practiced. Ultimately the project team developed a liturgy that shared the same components as the present, but with an Afro-centric genre and narrative for the Sankofa Worship. If not for narration, and

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<sup>78</sup> Beversluis, *Sourcebook of the World's Religions*, 4.

documentary additions to the Sankofa, a traditional Black Baptist worshipper might perceive the worship service to have been a generic demonstration as any church sponsored Black history or Kwanza commemorative program. This demonstration, however, was unique in that the participants leading the worship had completed research on each of the liturgical components and formatted intelligent comparisons of two religious heritages, African American and Traditional African; which they narrated during the worship in order to prove an authentic multifaith ethic for those gathered. Thus it was not the typical Black history program where we simply recite poems, recant biographies of great Black people and sing Negro Spirituals, but it was a cliffhanger transformative worship experience that propelled the participant to seek to learn more about their socio-religious identity. There is no greater way to accomplish save through the worship arts. Transformation was not in the program format but transcended a prescribed liturgy via an overwhelming spiritual sensation that had permeated most of us in the room; transitioning us together to a social location that was strange, yet vaguely familiar, and consoling all at the same time. Indeed a true Sankofa experience, a worship ritual that energized Black life, ordered the chaos of Black existence, and provided a traditional Black Baptist with a firm foundation for spiritual, psychological and cultural growth in the wake of cultural dislocation.<sup>79</sup> The belief is that traditional Black Baptists practicing a Euro-centric liturgy only will remain culturally dislocated, but those who engage in the Sankofa Liturgy model will be reconciled to their cultural heritage. The Sankofa Worship Service Liturgy included Processional, Prayer, Song, Memorial, and Shouting creatively designed to situate the participants in a realm of spiritual freedom by way of their previously lost cultural heritage.

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<sup>79</sup> Dudley et al., *Sankofa*, IX.

## CHAPTER 6 GREAT DAY!

### **The “Sankofa” Worship Service at Mount Calvary Baptist Church**

The gathering for the Sankofa Worship was scheduled for Saturday, December 12, 2009 at 2:30 PM. It was important for the Site/Support Teams to begin on time considering the fact that it was during the height of the shopping season for the Holidays, and they did not want to hold the gathered hostage, per se, but to educate them in becoming transformative worshippers. Gratefully, the advent season represents a window of opportunity for the Sankofa model to be a substantial addition to an already busy Holiday season. Save February’s Black History theme, the month of December is also commensurate with African heritage awareness building thanks to Kwanza. Therefore, the Sankofa Worship was neither ill-timed nor inconvenient, but it served as an alternative or even compromised form of a traditional seven-day Kwanza commemoration complicated by its terminology and negated by being unaccepted in a traditional Black Baptist Church like Mount Calvary. Indeed Mount Calvary utilizes classic liturgy, especially during the high Christian seasons of Advent and Lent. Hence the caroling and pageantry of the nativity scene was a vital traditional exercises that did not negotiate with Kwanza, but readily compromised with the Sankofa Worship Service, which promised just an hour of their conscious time, as opposed to the seven days of Kwanza. Whereas Kwanza represents a radical nuance for this traditional Black Baptist

Church, Sankofa was purposely marketed as a vaguely maiden Holiday program of the new pastor who the people of Mount Calvary sought to appease. Assuredly this was a marketing tactic that worked for the intimate gathering that included over forty participants. The Sankofa Worship Service was announced through fliers and radio announcements. Members of Mount Calvary were sent invitations via email and “snail mail,” and fliers were mailed to other Baptist congregations in the Greater Springfield area thanks to the many connections of the project team. Fliers were also posted in four local colleges. The attractive brevity of the Sankofa was marketed in the Mount Calvary Sunday worship guide for four consecutive Sundays prior to December 12th.<sup>80</sup> The project team gathered to consecrate and set-up the fellowship hall for the Sankofa Worship. They chose the fellowship hall as opposed to the larger capacity of the sanctuary because of the intimate and relaxed setting that the fellowship hall would offer. The intimacy was orchestrated by arranging the seating in two circles, an inner circle and an outer circle, to allow participants to easily see each other in hopes of viewing an emotive worship of another person that would inspire their own. A rustic table, covered with African mud cloth from Ghana, was placed in the middle of the circle, which had one small opening for the participants to enter and exit from. The table was also adorned with pine leaves (indicative of Christmas tide), candles, a chalice and the calabash. All other chairs were removed from the hall, so participants would not sit outside of the prescribed circle. Still we had to deal with those who arrived early, and re-positioned their seats on the outside of the circle. Truly there were some in attendance who were embedded in a tradition that ascribes more to comfort and selfishness, as opposed to an

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<sup>80</sup> Appendix 8

aptitude toward newness, follow-ship and openness towards the seemingly unfamiliar. Perhaps signage in the form of a disclaimer placed in entry ways would have helped people to smoothly transition into the unfamiliar. Actually there was a limited briefing offered to the participants prior to the Sankofa Worship Service which resulted in the unfamiliar being manifested as the totally confused, evidenced by the initial frowns and grimaces on participants' faces. I would strongly recommend at least two awareness building workshops for Sankofa Worship service participants prior to their attendance. Because of this, the project team functioned dually as consolingly provocative ushers and narrators; neither of which should be confused with apologists. Indeed they stood in solidarity as they sought to transform the liturgy of the traditional Black Baptist church through a culturally enriching exercise of worship.

The Sankofa worship began promptly at 2:30PM with a brief statement of the purpose; the Restoration of a traditional Black Baptist Church to its Multifaith Identity by Honoring Some African Worship Traditions. This statement although different from the earlier recommendation of congregational briefing, served as an introduction to this new paradigm in worship. The project team and I decided against the use of an individual worship guide (program), as it was considered too similar to the regular Sunday program format. Instead the components of liturgy that the participants were to engage in were posted on the walls in the room.<sup>81</sup> This lessened the distraction of passing out programs and flipping the pages. The wall mounted program afforded the entire gathering to transition simultaneously into all four components of the liturgy.

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<sup>81</sup> Appendix 8



The first item of the Sankofa Liturgy was the Processional into Worship. All the participants were instructed to assemble outside of the worship space to demonstrate unity of community. They assembled in the following order: African Drummer, African Dancer, the Project Team, and the Lay Gatherers (participants). The project team and several of the participants used hand held instruments that made a loud percussive sound; these instruments included nutshell shakers, Rhythm Gourds – an African bowl adorned with cowrie shells, Zulu grass rattles and Kpoko Kpoko – double-ended wooden bells. These instruments added to the energized rhythmic procession into worship as we sang repeatedly, “Siyahamb' ekukhanyen' kwenkhos’,” a South African folk melody whose English translation means, “We are Marching in the Light of God”.<sup>82</sup> Indeed the gathering marched around the circular arrangements of the seats several times, loudly and boisterously, indicating the celebration of worship via the joyous gathering moving into the adoration of their Awesome God. Clearly this processional patterned after the lengthy, ornate and spirited procession of a Spiritual Baptist Worship in which the entire gathering processed, generated an excitement which lasted throughout the service. Once the gathering settled into their seats, the Call to Worship was in the form of an Ashanti (Ghana) Prayer for Blessing recited by the project team.<sup>83</sup> In order to qualify Mount Calvary’s tradition of the “Children’s Call” as a having a multifaith origin, a project team member acted as an West African Griot presenting the African Oral tradition by telling a story about unity in the community, summarized by the entire gathering singing “One Love”, written by reggae artist Bob Marley.<sup>84</sup> The “story” functioned as the sermonic

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<sup>82</sup> Appendix 13

<sup>83</sup> Appendix 14

<sup>84</sup> Appendix 15

message, generally considered to be the zenith of a traditional Black Baptist liturgy.

However the most stunning and persuasive feature of this Sankofa Worship service was the Prayer/Memorial Circle.

The Prayer/Memorial portion of liturgy was derived from the Dance Africa 2009 event we attended at the Brooklyn Academy of Music.<sup>85</sup> Dance Africa is a vibrant celebration of the culture of the African Diaspora through dance, music, art and an outdoor bazaar. The memorial prayer used in Dance Africa acknowledged African ancestors by reciting the names of deceased Black people that have impacted the African Diaspora. Following this, African dancers slowly passed up and down the aisles of the theatre signaling the audience to call out names of their ancestors as the dancer passes and extends their arms towards their row. Similarly, the Prayer/Memorial segment began with a solemn roll call of Mount Calvary's deceased members, accompanied by African drumming, while a dancer called the "Shadow Angel" stepped in time around the gathering circle. The prayer/memorial became increasingly delicate as the dancer moved into the outer circle and gently touched participants on their shoulder, signaling them to call out their ancestor by name. Despair had permeated the room. People were crying as the one acting as an African Griot led the gathering in singing "Kumbaya, Somebody's Crying My Lord, Kumbaya".

The participants transitioned to the symbolically animist portion of the liturgy to remember their beginnings in North America and the Caribbean by reverencing the soil of their past, linking some indigenous African spiritual principals found in Yoruba and Vodoun, namely the reverence of nature spirits. Nature spirits are spirits that inhabit or

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<sup>85</sup> Appendix 16

live in nature. These spirits are considered to be good since they provide people with the essentials of food and water. Notwithstanding, the Sankofa soil reverence was incorporated in the liturgy to build awareness of the love and authority of God that is manifested in the environment which a traditional Black Baptist Church often overlooks during their worship. Furthermore, it was used to shift the perception of a seemingly ungodly animist practice into substantial and relevant worship to foster a sense of pride through restoration to a true ethnic identity that had become ambiguous due to enslavement in America. Therefore participants were encouraged to collect soil from the places where they were born, wrap the soil in a favored cloth, compose a statement of their early life, such as “I was born and frolicked in the red clay of Georgia.” Finally, they placed their soil presentation in the communal calabash (a large pot) that was placed on the centered table.

After the ancestral roll call, soil offering and song, the participants stood and formed a prayer circle simulating the “ring shout” of the Chattel slave church. They were encouraged to talk to God in their own way, simultaneously and aloud. The noise level rose to a feverish pitch as the project team, also in the circle, began to moan, wail and yes, shout. The ring shout yielded a release of despair and angst that had evolved from the ancestral memorial to climactic proportions in this liturgical moment. Everyone in the gathering participated; both the curious spectators and the extremely conservative worshipper joined in the communal shout. And indeed it felt good. In fact, the project team, during our debriefing session, stated that they felt released from the traditional denominational format as they felt uninhibited to be creative and expressive in their worship which burgeoned from a cultural memory that was revived through the Sankofa

Worship Service. Moreover they were made to feel safe in their expressions because there was full participation in the processional, songs, prayers and shouts. The Team along with the other participants decided to develop a plan to combine this maiden freedom in worship into their own traditional Sunday worship format.

## CHAPTER 7

### DO WE WORSHIP THE SAME GOD?

A prominent dynamic existed throughout this Sankofa Project that if given credence to, could have trumped the transformation of our congregation from old liturgy praxis to new. Not giving credence to this dynamic did not in any way mean that we ignored it; on the contrary, the Site/Support Team had to massage this dynamic in order for the project to go forward and be an inclusive liturgical feature of Mount Calvary's Worship. This dynamic, of sort, is the mistaken belief that Animism, and other indigenous forms of African Spirituality are simply the rituals of heathens who can be spiritually corrected through our occasional denominational Missions Ministry giving. Regrettably this functioning dynamic is the fact that time-honored African Spirituality was considered to be of a lesser religious practice than their own, similar to the mindset of European Missionaries aforementioned which divided the nineteenth century West Africans, ultimately enslaving its inhabitants. An enormous amount of re-educating the misinformed, through continual awareness building workshop sessions, is vital to the forward movement of this Sankofa Liturgy Project, to diminish this negative dynamic. Keeping in mind what the Apostle Paul said to the church at Ephesus in Ephesians 6:12: Hence it is unproductive to be angry with uninformed individuals – "Flesh and blood", but it is useful to challenge the "High places" or the prominent dynamic, which in this case, represented our biased thoughts. Given the discomfort the team experienced while

observing the use of snakes in an African Voodoo ceremony and the animist ritual of initiation described in Yoruba, the summit of theological uneasiness for this team was rooted in the argument of Polytheism or Monotheism. Hence the query, “Do we worship the same God as our African predecessors?” is answered in a creative interpretation of the Triune God which Black Baptists worship through the doctrine of the trinity. Black Baptists generally ascribe to the following interpretation of the trinity based on the Articles of Faith:

We believe there is one and only one living and true God, an infinite Spirit, the Maker and Supreme Ruler of heaven and earth; inexpressibly glorious in holiness and all other perfections, and worthy of all possible honor, confidence and love; that in the unity of the Godhead there are three Persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, equal in every divine perfection, and executing distinct but harmonious offices in the great work of redemption.<sup>86</sup>

### **Polytheism—Monotheism Connection**

Here the word “trinity” describes one Godhead who exists in the unity of three distinct personalities, namely God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Each of these persons is distinct from each other, yet in essence, one. Indeed this can be complicated, still simplified by polytheists who interpret the notion of unity in distinction as three separate gods which equates Christianity to polytheism.

The purpose here is not to configure an apology or qualify Black Baptist monotheism, but we seek to find common ground as we respectfully explore the inherent multi-faith ethic of the Black Baptist Church in America, to merge some tenets of indigenous African religions to produce the Sankofa Liturgy Model. Defining God based

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<sup>86</sup> Faith Baptist Church, “Articles of Faith Baptist Church: Table of Contents,” <http://fbcbrainerd.org/docs/articles.pdf> (accessed January 12, 2009).

on the similarities of the deity is an essential prerequisite to effectuate a more horizontal assembly of the Sankofa Liturgy Model, in addition to eradicating the fear and biases of the traditional Black Baptist worshipper. Perhaps the distinction between monotheism and polytheism is not one of religious belief but rather a question of emphasis, either on the oneness of Spirit or of the plurality of its manifestations. African indigenous religions include ideas about a high god, a creator, as well as a multiplicity of lesser spirits, associated with specific localities or kin groups. These lesser spirits governed local events and social relationships, whereas the creator god transcended specific localities.<sup>87</sup> For example, in the Yoruba religion, the “High God” is thought of as a lofty, transcendent principle that cannot be approached directly. Therefore, this “High God,” called Olodumare, is worshipped by the inter-mediation of a lesser principles or "Orisa"("Orixa"), whom the Yoruba collectively refer to as the "Irunmale." Olodumare is so lofty and transcendent that it is rarely mentioned. In fact, there are no temples or shrines dedicated to Olodumare, yet this God is described as a jovial fellow in the skies who is withdrawn from direct human contact.

Subsequently, the Yoruba never actively worship Olodumare, which roughly translates as “the almighty.” Furthermore, there are no shrines dedicated to the almighty or sacrifices attributed to him nor are there priest. Similar to the Judeo-Christian and Islamic God, Olodumare is considered the “Creator of all things, the all knowing and the final judge of mankind.”<sup>88</sup> One theory is that Olodumare was developed through the

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<sup>87</sup> John Thomas Didymus, Polytheism and the Evolution of Monotheistic Synthetic Vision of God <http://EzineArticles.com/5476116> (accessed September 15, 2009).

<sup>88</sup>Festus A. Balogun, *Silence in Yoruba Traditional Worship and in Christian Liturgy*. (Ondo State, Nigeria: Artcrafts, 2003), 11.

influence of early Islamic and Christian missionaries as a simulacrum of the God of those religions; again an example of the acquiescent nature of the subordinate class to the dominant elite. The worship of lesser deities that are either independent of or preceding the almighty Olodumare have been explained to early missionaries in West Africa as lesser gods descended from the single the one almighty God, just as Jesus was the son of the Christian God.<sup>89</sup> Black Baptists believe that Jesus is the son of God, and God transcended in human form, who related to humanity as He worked His ministry here on the planet. After his death on the cross, He was resurrected and sits on the right hand of God (the Almighty) subsequently dispatching another form of deity to relate to all humanity through the auspices of the Holy Spirit. The question of whether the Black Baptist worships the same God as their African fore-worshippers cannot be answered conclusively. It is neither affirmative nor negative. Rather it is the concept of an Almighty God and the varied manifestations of intimate relationships with humanity that must be the established commonality in order to affect a basic multi faith conduit for a Sankofa Liturgy that will restore the traditional Black Baptist Church to its multifaith identity.

### **Believing Baptist**

The question of symbols or representations must also be considered as we explore the lesser deities in African indigenous religions. First it should be established that, according to the doctrine of the traditional Black Baptist, there does not exist a hierarchal relationship among the trinity; as per the third Article of Faith – the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are equally and unified:

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<sup>89</sup> Hal Horton, “Yoruba Religion and Myth,” <http://www.postcolonialweb.org/nigeria/yorubarel.html> (accessed October 12, 2009).



...that in the unity of the Godhead there are three Persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, equal in every divine perfection, and executing distinct but harmonious offices in the great work of redemption.<sup>90</sup>

Conventionally however, many traditional Black Baptists, in participating in this project, perceive Father God to be the highest authority; followed by Jesus, who is their personal savior; then the Holy Spirit or Holy Ghost who is the least of the three. This believed to be so because the Holy Spirit has been equated to emotional outburst during worship and often challenges the comfort zone of community respectability, albeit acceptance of the dominant elite. Hence the doctrine of trinity is negated as symbols or representations of God. (Awareness building, in this regard is on-going). Consequently the misinformed traditional Black Baptist will relate to, and involve themselves, differently to each symbolic component of the Christian trinity.

Considering the religious tradition of Islam, this notion of “being involved with or through certain symbols” that ultimately transcends their (the symbols) presupposition or purpose can at best contradict “living religiously” contingent upon the practitioner. It really is a matter of subjectivity. Assuredly in any tradition, this ethereal subjectivity would be problematic; but in the case of Islam religious tradition, it would be the very distortion between the identities of Mushrik, Kafir and Mu'min. According to Islamic doctrine, the Mushrik is the Islamic sin of polytheism, more specifically worshipping gods other than Allah or giving his attributes to others beside him. Kafir and Mu'min are direct opposite entities; Kafir is an unbeliever and Mu'min is one who has deep abiding faith in Allah. Doctrinally speaking, Islam is definitively monotheistic thereby relegating the religion of the “other” as lesser forms of religion. Clearly, Black Baptists in America

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<sup>90</sup> Faith Baptist Church, “Articles of Faith Baptist Church: Table of Contents,” Faith Baptist Church, <http://fbcbrainerd.org/docs/articles.pdf> (accessed January 12, 2009).

would be guilty of Mushrik and defined as Kafir. However some theorists surmise that there is a human incapacity to experience God, which makes them question the existence of God. Hence, these types of faith practitioners build walls around their souls by pretending divine nearness. Regrettably this forms a prevalent dichotomy that exist in their religious spiritual expression as they perpetrate the notion of divine nearness through elation, euphoria and enthusiasm followed by a frustrating sense of dryness, which calls into question the true existence of God.<sup>91</sup> The inability to “feel God” via a spiritual euphoric experience, such as shouting, distinguishes the traditional Black Baptist church from the Pentecostal-inspired Baptist movement. The Pentecostal effect has shaped the free- moving liturgy that we experience in the contemporary Black Baptist church; the results being that hymns have been replaced with worship songs, devotional services have been replaced with praise/worship, and any altering of the prescribed program guide has been blamed on the move of the Holy Spirit. Regrettably the role of liturgist switched to spiritual cheerleaders for God in order to combat the dryness felt in the worship service of a traditional Black Baptist church; evidenced by the call to worship being simplified by saying, “come on and give God some praise!” This feeling of divine dryness causes the worshippers frustration, which might explain the hierarchal, time-honored perception of the trinity that forms the embedded theology of the traditional Black Baptist evident in those who served on this project support team. Indeed, there is a theology of consequence that results in minimizing the complete supremacy of God by solely relating to the humanity of Jesus and the ethereal mysterious nature of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit becoming one who the people can manipulate and romanticize at

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<sup>91</sup> “On Henotheism: Beyond Monotheism & Polytheism, An Invitation to Gnosis,” <http://www.sofiatopia.org/equiaeon/henotheism.htm>.(accessed February 9, 2011).

will in order to anesthetize the pain of this divine dryness. Doctrinally speaking, Black Baptists in general are monotheist; however, the traditional Black Baptists presented in this project tend to be uniformed monotheist who would gain by living and learning their own doctrine in order to respect the worship practices of others. Assuredly traditional Black Baptists ascribe to the authority of the Bible through varied beliefs based on their individual hermeneutic. Awareness building through a Bible study of I Corinthians, Chapter Eight helped the support team to conjoin and substantiate their monotheistic stance, as well as to comprehend how indigenous African religions might understand their god. Specifically it was verse 6 that defined for them their monotheistic position:

But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him.

Verses Four through Five helped the team to understand the god of others, consequently, in the form of a lesser god defined which is relegated to an idol. Certainly this concept is not conducive to a multifaith essence that is essential to having a productive Sankofa Worship Service. Therefore, it was crucial for our team to define themselves as both monotheist and henotheist simultaneously. Henotheism is the worship of a particular god, by a denomination or faith tradition, without disbelieving in the existence of the god, or the paths to god of others religions. Indeed there must be an element of compromise devoid of prostylization in order for the traditional Black Baptist to participate in the Sankofa Worship. This collaborative multifaith ethic is found in the Black Baptist worshipper's understanding of their God, yet not negating the god of their predecessors. Clearly traditional Black Baptists do not worship the same god as the time-honored African religions. However, similarities in deity exist between the two genres of worship uncovering common ground by which to incorporate some tenants of time-

honored African worship into the existing liturgy of a traditional Black Baptist worship service. The liturgical similarities have been observed through the passionate emotion that is exhibited in prayer, chanting, singing, shouting and memorializing, and in the processional. Clearly the paths these religions take to the creator god are different, but the fact remains that these religious traditions all acknowledge the existence of a creator god. Traditional Black Baptists seeking restoration to their multifaith identity by incorporating African worship, which pre-dates the North Atlantic slave trade, must know who they are as global worshippers; not simply as isolated, boxed-in Black Baptists. They must flourish in the shared intersecting figure that is produced when two seemingly finite circles overlap, as viewed in the Mathematical study of Venn Diagrams. At least the circles are well rounded.

<sup>4</sup>As concerning therefore the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice unto idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one.

<sup>5</sup>For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many, and lords many,)... I Corinthians 8:4-5 (KJV)

Indeed this provocative pericope suggests to traditional Black Baptists that they share a similar monotheistic stance with Moslems; that there is only one true god.

## CHAPTER 8 RESTORATION CONTINUED: CONCLUSION

Tremaine Hawkins sang these words during the adlibbed portion of the song called *Changed*:

I'm not what I want to be...  
I'm not what I used to be...  
I'm just not the same way...  
Thank God...  
I've been changed.<sup>92</sup>

I concur, not as melodiously as Hawkins, but with a passion that would rival any gospel singer. For indeed I have been transformed, to accept my religious social location in a balanced and meaningful way that will facilitate a continuum of restoration, allowing me to worship God with any believing worshipper regardless of how they practice their faith. At the start of this journey, I identified myself as “out-of-the-box”, my way of negotiating the challenges of my traditional Black Baptist religious upbringing. These challenges included stoic church services held in old church buildings with stained glass windows adorned with White Biblical characters. I grew tired of trying to be something that I could never achieve; that of being a White-skinned, Black male who is loved by a God in the sky somewhere who could not love me or accept me in this earthly realm. Clearly this made no sense to me as a child, and subsequently, became my wilderness experience

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<sup>92</sup> Tremaine Hawkins, “Changed” song lyrics, <http://www.sweetslyrics.com/371745.Walter%20Hawkins%20-%20Changed.html> (accessed January 4, 2011).

as a young adult. Indeed, I was all over the place religiously, but still stuck in my Black Baptist denomination. I needed, desired and sought a lifting.

### **Not What I Used to Be: Lifted**

I recall my first class at New York Theological Seminary, at its former location on Twenty-Ninth Street, when Drs. Alfaro and Lucas asked the class to name their favorite Biblical character. I had the audacity to name David, simply because we both are musicians; but I was not a brave warrior nor did I have an aptitude for majestic leadership. At that time, I was ashamed of who I was and needed a theological explanation of My Call to the Gospel Ministry. Hence I was “Lifted<sup>↑</sup>” when I began to empathize, and then identify, with the Gadarene Demoniac. God’s love for the Gadarene man in the fifth chapter of the Gospel of Mark was all encompassing without boundaries. Here God sends an evil spirit to minister to an oppressed community so that they would glorify Him. The theological implication is that God is always good even when bad things are happening. God can manipulate evil for the ultimate good, such that it was an evil spirit from God that caused Saul to make several murderous attempts on David. Similarly it was an adverse spirit sent from God that caused this Gadarene man to cut himself with stones, to be restrained, naked and tormented. Yet oddly enough, this same spirit allowed him to “see” and “worship” Jesus. Is there duality in the evil spirit or are the evil spirits subject to the Power of God? The text defines the adverse spirit as “unclean”, but fails to offer a conflicting, albeit alternative (clean), spirit that propelled the man to recognize and worship Jesus. Assuredly, the evil spirits are subject to the Power of God and, therefore, able to recognize this power in the person of Jesus.

The *unclean spirit* that tormented the Gadarene man was not simply the work of a lone imp, but the result of a hegemonic demon evidenced by a community that facilitated his residency in the tomb, and an imperial government that oppressed the community. This evil was perpetrated by a system designed to instill feelings of powerlessness in the demoniac and his community. Figuratively, the demoniac lived in exile from his community, a community that often attempted to bind him; oppression yields oppression. Cognizant of the fact that a community represents a cohesive unit, it is safe to say that the Gadarene community depended upon the common enemy of the demoniac to support their unity. The real legion here is the Roman Army that Jesus remanded to two thousand pigs and the community which marveled at the man's healing and deliverance, "clothed and in his right mind." (Mark 5:15b KJV) Regrettably, embedded theology dictates that only those who maintain a righteous life can see Jesus.

The institution of oppressive power had seemingly transferred from the White West to the Traditional Black Baptist Church. Whereas the Black Baptist Church was a formidable force during the Civil Rights Movement, it has become a sleeping giant as she has acquiesced to the comfort of marginalized status. Hence, thank God that through all the fog of my wilderness, living in exile within my community, the Holy Spirit allowed me to literally see Jesus as a lover and forgiver. I ultimately ran to Jesus via many different religious paths, and finally worshipped God devoid of any specific liturgical genre.

Although I am no longer the same prototype of Traditional Black Baptist presented in this project dissertation, I'm simply *not the same way*. I have garnered respect for my religious upbringing and have included it in the progression of my

continued being. The question is, if we are *not the same way*, then what *way* are we? Simply, we are transformed to be better.

### **Changed**

The Sankofa Liturgy Model has changed the Mount Calvary Baptist Church, not from being a traditional Black Baptist Church, but to being a traditional Black Baptist Church that is open to embracing time-honored African Worship tenets used to validate their own unique genre of worship. Whereas Mount Calvary only acknowledged their Afrocentricity during the fourth Sunday in Black History Month by wearing African garb, this changed congregation has produced a Christian coffee house ministry titled, The Sankofa Café. The Sankofa Café is an event and place that provides a relaxed worship atmosphere that celebrates the legacy of Black people through artifacts, poetry, dance and music. The church has produced three Sankofa Café's, and they have become notable community events in Springfield.

There have been changes in liturgy. The former Children's Call now includes a *Legacy With-In Us* addition, which is an anecdotal account of Mount Calvary's history recanted by a "seasoned" parishioner. In addition, the processional of Mount Calvary has become more spirited with the inclusion of drums and ecstatic movement, reflecting more of our African beginnings.

Indeed Mount Calvary as a faith community is *not the same way*. A remnant, namely this project team, has been *Change*. Restoration is ongoing and progressive. Our liturgy continues to be massaged, and the Sunday bulletin is less programmed, as our parishioners earnestly seek God in a multifaceted, covertly non-denomination, and in a multifaith context.



## APPENDICES

## Appendix 1

### Dr. Kamal Ali Consent Letter

Zimbra: markcflowers@comcast.net

Page 1 of 1

SmartZone Communications Center Collaboration Suite

markcflowers@comcast.net

RE: Down to the wire

Tuesday, March 02, 2010 9:20:29 PM

From: KALI@wsc.ma.edu

To: markcflowers@comcast.net

Salaam.

Such a joy hearing that you're close to completion, Mark. And I'm certain, after reading the text you've shared with me, that it is a seminal work, and a splendid job, well done! My God, the One, the Only, Bless you in this effort, and may He, the Merciful, reward you with the Best of Rewards, both in this life, and in the Life to Come. As for my permission to be included in this triumph, you couldn't keep me out. I am, of course, very flattered and honored, and grant you permission most humbly. I'll look forward to viewing the final product when that time comes.

Meanwhile, be well, my Brother, be in touch, and above all, be in Peace.

Hajj Kamal

From: markcflowers@comcast.net [mailto:markcflowers@comcast.net]

Sent: Tuesday, March 02, 2010 11:15 AM

To: Ali, Kamal

Subject: Down to the wire

Shalom Dr. Ali-

Again, I thank you for all your assistance in my dissertation writing; your advice, and ammendments were signifcant and useful in this process. Please allow me to include your comments in the final work as a footnoted item. In order to do this your consent is needed. Your affirmative response to this email will suffice. I would, at anytime you desire, be available to show you the final copy. As always, I need great thinkers like yourself, to improve the work of ministry to a traditional black baptist Church-in hopes to restore us to our multifaith identity.

Thank you so much for your kind consideration.

Blessings,

Mark

<http://sz0136.wc.mail.comcast.net/zimbra/mail>

3/2/20

**Appendix 2**  
**Mrs. Dorothy Saunders' Consent Letter**

March 20, 2011

Dear Reverend Flowers

I thank you for allowing me to share such a great history of the African American Community in Greater Springfield. You have my permission and I consent to the use of my name in your Project Dissertation. I pray that your work in the building of the consciousness of the Mount Calvary Baptist Church will continue.

Sincerely,

  
Mrs. Dorothy Saunders

### **Appendix 3**

#### **Hermeneutical Self Inventory**

October 27, 2007

#### **1) RELIGIOUS HISTORY AND TRADITION**

Interpretation of the *sacred text* based on my religious history and tradition burgeon from oppression that seeks liberation via the ekklesia. Again, religious history and tradition is conjoined in the ideology of the Black Baptist church under the auspices of the National Baptist Convention USA, more specifically, the local Black Baptist Church located in a city of four square miles, packed with over one hundred other religious meeting spaces: *churches, synagogues, a mosque*, all of which are comprised of a population that is approximately seventy-five percent Black/African-American. I concur with Anthony B. Pinn's characterization of the Black Church in his work, *The Black in the Post Civil Rights Era*, that the church for me has been the best hope for it provides a *safe space on which to rise, compete and work on both the spiritual and material standing*. Hence interpretation of the sacred text was formed, derived, adjusted and altered for the ultimate liberation of my race and culture.

#### **2) AUTHORITATIVE CRITERIA**

The twenty Articles of Faith used for catechism list our religious text as the first article. Further this article states that God is the author of the Bible *written by men divinely inspired by God*. The Church Covenant is also an authoritative criterion, which differs slightly among Baptists though usually recited during the Lord's Supper.

### **3) WORKING THEOLOGY**

My working theology is encapsulated in the ministry of the *Man with the Unclean Spirit*. The *unclean spirit* that tormented the Gadarene Demoniac, as recorded in the fifth chapter of Mark's Gospel, was not simply the work of a lone imp, but the result of a hegemonic demon evidenced by a community that facilitated his residency in the tomb, and an imperial government that oppressed the community. The demoniac lived in exile of his oppressed community who often attempted to bind him: oppression yields oppression. Hence a working theology is the implementation of strategic ministry to the oppressed that will guide them towards self-sufficiency, leading healthy and productive lives. Oppression resulting from a plethora of social ills; including: drug abuse, people living with HIV/AIDES, incarceration, homelessness etc. Indeed my working theology is the same as my formal theology, although it is not widely accepted among my associates and continues to be an issue with some of the *old guard* present in the church I pastor. There are an increasing number of men who had been incarcerated joining the church; hence, they wear jeans that sag instead of a suit and tie- in addition, there are other *contemporary* parishioners with unusual piercing, and tattoos. This is uncomfortable for the noisy *old guard* and often puts me into a dual role of advocate and apologist-the unappreciated component of my working theology.

### **4) ETHNICITY**

I interpret the text from a point of privilege. Being a Black male; I cleave to the politic of oppression. Therefore, I closely identify with being the *chosen vessel of God*; surely the

### Appendix 3

plight of the children of Israel in the wilderness is the same situation I face on a daily basis as a Black man in America. So in this case, I'm grateful, albeit, a privileged Black man living and being unclean in "the tombs", like the Gadarene Demoniac knowing that God will rescue, restore and lift.

#### **5) GENDER**

Contrary to my religious tradition, which in the last twenty years has begun to ordain female Deacons and now,, more recently has allowed women to Pastor, I firmly believe that God can use and does use anyone regardless of their gender, race or sexual persuasion: *no respect of persons*. Because I am a male, I feel more inclined to explore the text from an inclusive perspective, to rectify the fact that the Black Baptist Movement was male dominated with mostly female participation. Sometimes I'm guilty of overcompensating, going the extra mile even, when it is unwarranted.

#### **6) SOCIAL CLASS**

Grateful that I was reared in a strong middle class background, or what I thought was middle class. This may have in reality been poor if defined by my parents' earnings. Still I was raised with the mainstreamed middle class values that I would achieve more than my parents by graduating college and ultimately realizing the "American Dream". The white picket fence, gorgeous wife, 2.5 children, two cars and a great career did not in any way create a hierarchal agenda that would facilitate a patronizing disposition towards those who were not as blessed. I was, and continue to be, intrigued with the plight of the underprivileged and the underserved, and their relationship with the dominant elite class that holds them down. Hence interpretation and, sometimes even, manipulation of the

### Appendix 3

text towards freeing and edifying the proposed underclass, devoid of a prosperity Gospel discourse has been the intent.

#### **7) EDUCATION**

Thank God for education and illumination. I can read the text through many different lenses because I have been given many tools for research. Rarely does the sacred text stand alone for me, particularly when teaching. It is juxtaposed with many commentaries, word studies and historical journals, seeking to obtain an holistic interpretation.

#### **8) COMMUNITY PRIORITIES**

The community where I minister is suffering from youth shootings, federal probes at City Hall and an increase of HIV infections among teenagers, which causes me to teach that God is Shalom and God is healer. Moreover, we have organized community forums with other religious leaders to engage in dialogue around solving the aforementioned community issues.

#### **10) IMPLICIT POLITICAL STANCE AND/OR EXPLICIT POLITICAL POSITION:**

The explicit stance of my faith community is aligned with that of the United Black Clergy, which is supporting the incumbent that is currently under a federal probe because of misappropriation funds. The incumbent has wine and dined the clergy with elaborate breakfast meetings to discuss our individual parish ministries targeting youth violence. As previously stated, my faith community and associates explicitly supported the incumbent; however, I maintained an implicit political stance during these breakfast

### Appendix 3

meetings and eventually supported the contender. Indeed, I am political, and my Christology purports that Jesus is political also. I interpret the text from a position of political power via revolution, and renegade and advocate actions.

#### **11) TRANSLATIONS OF THE SACRED (RELIGIOUS) TEXT**

An interpretation of the socio-historical relevance of the religious text is supported by using resources that identify the idiom of the time. The Interpreters Bible, along with various other commentaries found in the LOGOS Program, are all used to extrapolate contemporary application of the text.

#### **12) PUBLISHED RESOURCES**

Again, published resources help me to formulate a holistic, well-informed synopsis of the text. The religious text often illuminates my spiritual understanding, but these published resources bring my intellect up to par.

#### **13) INTENT AND EFFECT OF “PREACHING”:**

Generally, it is unacceptable for me to speak in my faith community outside the religious text. Obviously the preaching exercise always includes a portion of the religious text as the foundation of the preaching exercise. Regrettably, on a few occasions, I was coerced into considering religious text as entertainment; but I am always compelled to use religious text as an agent of change. My intent usually yields to truthful revelations in the text that either moves people towards freedom or deposits them into resentment until the next preachment.



### Appendix 3

#### **14) ORIENTATION TO (RELIGIOUS) SCHOLARS AND/OR SCHOLARSHIP:**

The views of Scholars help me in my understanding of the religious text as they challenge me to constantly re-think and re-shape my theology. Scholars, such as Daniel Migliore, James Scott and James Cone, are experts in defining Jesus as the lifter of the oppressed and a bona fide political figure. The familiar scholarship increases my sense of competence in the study of the text.

#### **15) FAMILY INFLUENCE**

My view of the religious text is very different from that of my parents. They were concerned with their outer appearance and being pleasing to others within their faith community. They behaved righteously as per their church tradition. I am concerned with the inner self and my responsibility for the well-being of others, particularly since I failed miserably at fitting into the proverbial “Black Baptist Box” of the early seventies. I do not engage in faith rhetoric in my extended family because there are tremendous hermeneutical differences. And that’s just fine for me.

#### **16) LIFE CRISIS:**

I have come to realize that there are many issues that can isolate individuals from the mainstream, forcing them to live in dank places because of guilt, shame and trauma. The lasting effect on my hermeneutical interpretation has been that I had to have life crises in order to minister (share God) with someone.

#### **17) HERMENEUTICAL SUSPICION:**

I believe the discourse of slave/master polity found in the New Testament can be harmful and inapplicable, as well as the discourse regarding the oppression of women, also found

### Appendix 3

in the New Testament. I deal with these texts by using additional resources and commentaries that look at the text against the socio-historical data.

#### **18) SPIRITUALITY OR DIVINE GUIDANCE:**

I believe that God speaks to me through the sacred text. Often I will input my name as God is speaking directly to me (e.g., “*The Lord is Mark’s shepherd, Mark shall not want*” [Psalm 23:1 KJV]). God’s divine guidance to me is in conflict when I refuse to hear or comply with God’s directives.

#### **A) HOW DO I MIX AND PRIORITIZE THE FACTORS?**

Yes, it is possible for me to rank the hermeneutical factors in terms of importance. However, I am surprised to put hermeneutical suspicion at the top of that list, simply because I am not always comfortable rationalizing or apologizing for these varied distorted text references. The less dominant factors relate to the highest ranked factors because of the imbedded theology, in that the less dominant have attempted to stigmatize my thinking.

#### **B) WHAT NEXT STEPS DO I WANT TO TAKE?**

I would like to list the suspicious messages in the sacred text that I find harmful and inapplicable. I need to re-think what God is saying to me without the element of fear and resentment.

Appendix 4  
Let's Go Back Questionnaire



**LET'S GO BACK**  
***PRE- DISCUSSION QUESTIONS***

*1-How did you become Baptist?*

*2- What **legacy** do you bring to the faith community?*

*3- Explain the notion of a “traditional black Baptist” Church.*

*4- What is your favorite part of your Baptist/ Worship liturgy and why?*

*5- What changes would you like to see in your corporate worship experience? Explain.*

## Appendix 5 Summary Grids

### Sankofa Liturgy Project Site/Support Team

Participants Name	Raised Baptist	Converted Baptist	Merge More Sankofa Liturgy with Present Liturgy More Than Once per month	Merge Less Than Once Per Month	Keep the Liturgy in its present format.
Nate B.		✓	✓		
Sherman D.	✓			✓	
Estelle B.	✓		✓		
Andrea D.	✓		✓		
Jacklyn M.		✓	✓		
Patricia D.	✓			✓	
Edward C.	✓		✓		
Barbara W.		✓	✓		
Annie P.	✓				✓
Brenda M.	✓				✓
Eboney D.	✓		✓		
Juanita G.	✓				✓
Dora M.	✓		✓		
Mark M.	✓		✓		
Eddie M.	✓			✓	
<b>Totals</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>

**Sankofa Liturgy Project Site/Support Team**

<b>Participants Name</b>	<b>Age 50 +</b>	<b>Raised in the North End of Springfield</b>	<b>Family Migrated From the Southern States</b>	<b>Relocated to Springfield within the last 15 years</b>	<b>Agrees that Mount Calvary Is Traditional Baptist</b>
Nate B.		✓	✓		✓
Sherman D.			✓	✓	✓
Estelle B.			✓		
Andrea D.	✓	✓	✓		✓
Jacklyn M.		✓	✓		✓
Patricia D.	✓	✓			
Edward C.			✓		✓
Barbara W.	✓	✓	✓		
Annie P.	✓		✓	✓	
Brenda M.	✓	✓	✓		✓
Eboney D.					✓
Juanita G.	✓	✓	✓		✓
Dora M.	✓	✓	✓		✓
Mark M.	✓	✓	✓		✓
Eddie M.	✓		✓		
<b>Totals</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>10</b>

**Appendix 6  
Sign In Sheet**

## LETS GO WAY, WAY BACK

WORKSHOP 2

NAME	EMAIL
Nate Brodie	
Sherman Davis	
Estelle BRODIE	
Andrea Davis	
Jacklyn mason	jhmason26@hotmail.com
Patricia DAVIS	
Edward Caudle	elcaudle@comcast.net
Barbara Watkins	bwatkins@mtlholyoke.edu
Annie S. Kerry	Annie.Kerry@genesistoo.com
Brenda Moses	Moses-brenda@hotmail.com
Ebonny F. Davis	
Tommie G. G. G. G.	
Dora Moran	
mark moran	
Eddie McCloud	

**Appendix 7**  
**Consent Letter for Sankofa Worship Service**

**Restoring the Black Church to its Multifaith Identity...*Honoring African Worship***

Mark E. Flowers, D. MIN Candidate

You will be a subject in a DMin Project entitled: Restoring the Black Church to its Multifaith Identity...*Honoring African Worship* about producing a legacy liturgy model that will embrace some tenants of the traditional African religious worship. The project will take six (6) months to complete and the results of the study will be shared with you and should provide you with information about the history of the African American Baptist church and the Multifaith essence of its liturgy which pre-dates the North Atlantic Slave trade. During this project you will:

- Participate in Six informative workshops,
- Observe three faith traditions other than Protestant - two are non-Christian faith traditions,
- Attend an annual African Festival,
- Produce and participate in a legacy liturgy model ( Worship Service).

Your name will not be included on any documents, your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and you may choose not to participate at any time.

By signing this consent form you agree to participate in the project.

---

Name

---

Date

For any further information contact Dr. Keith Russell at 475 Riverside Drive, New York, NY 10115  
(tel) 212-870-121

**Appendix 8**  
**Worship Guide Sankofa Service**

Processional

Prayer

Storytelling

**Mount Calvary Baptist Church**

"And They Were All One on Solomon's Porch." Acts 12b



*gathering sings and dances in "one love"*

Prayer

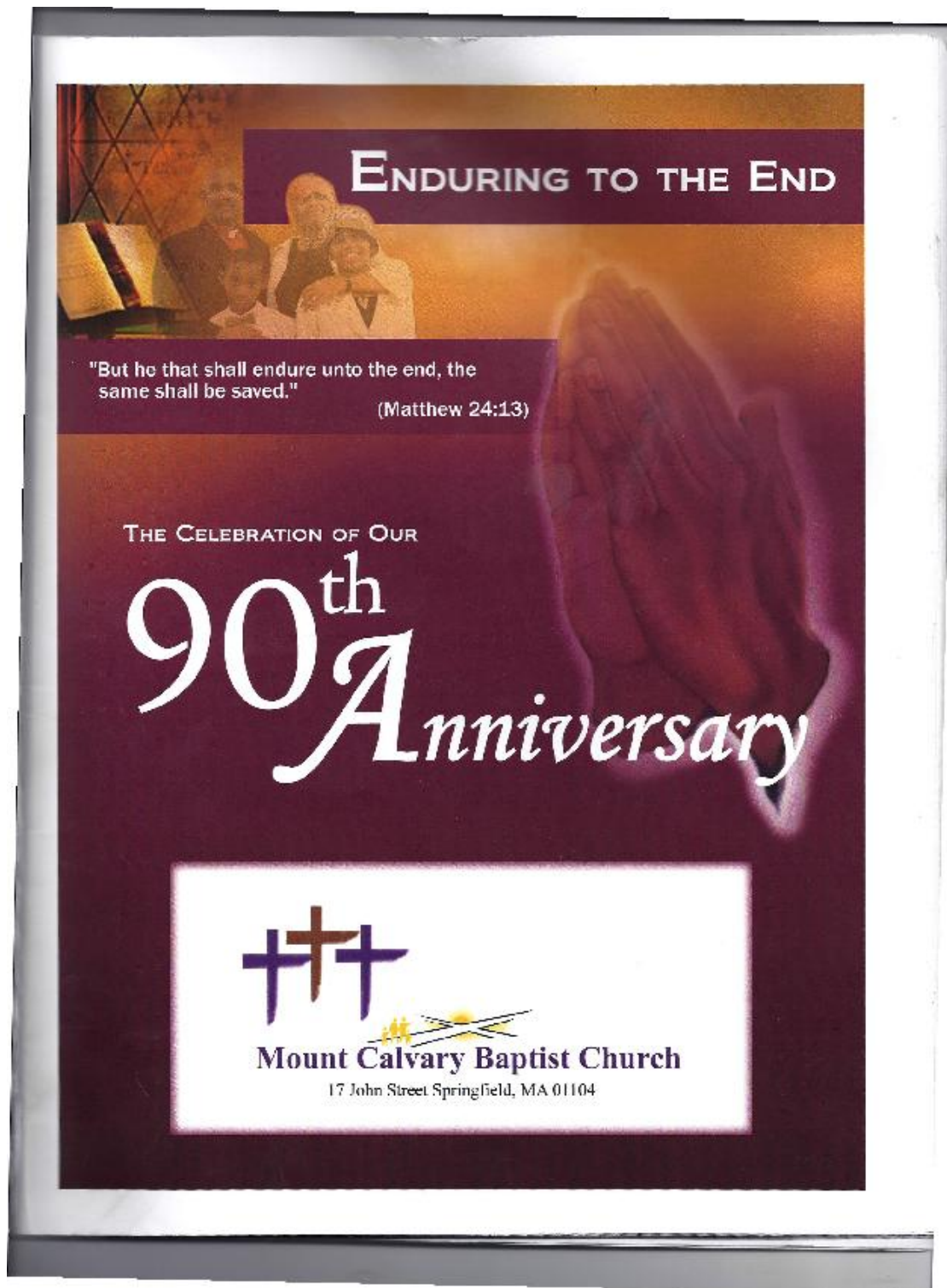
*One*

*One*

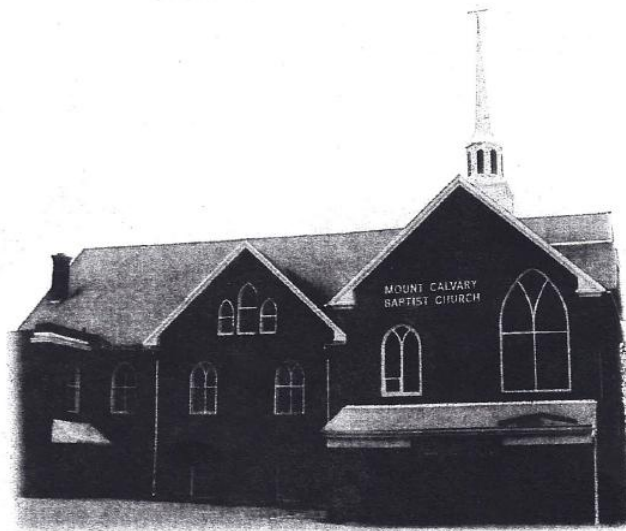
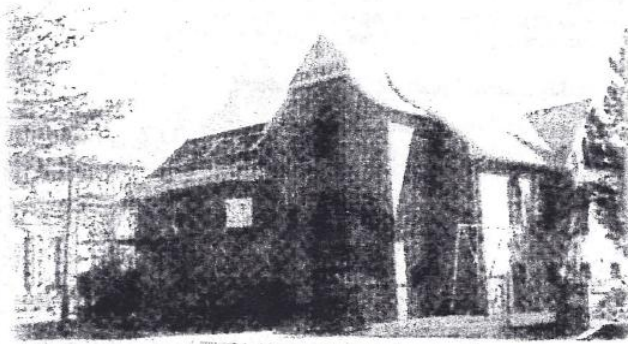
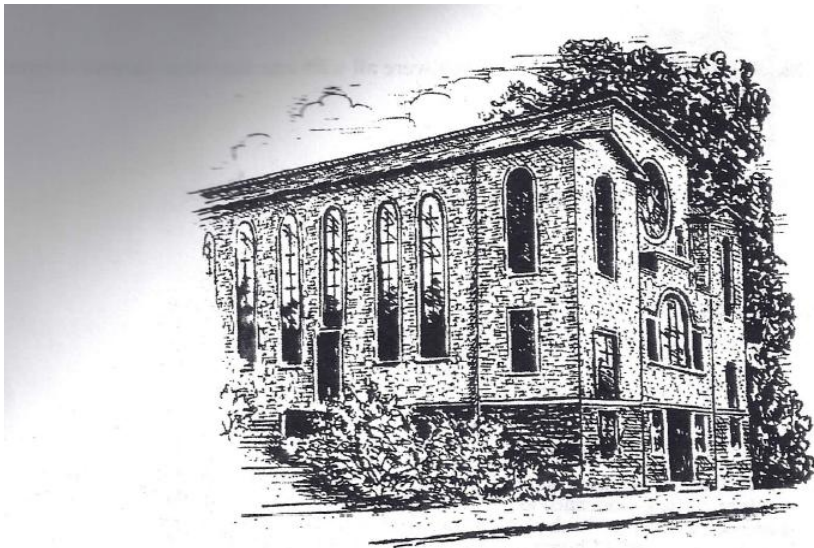
Memorial  
"we feel the spirit"  
depart



Appendix 9  
Mount Calvary Anniversary Journal

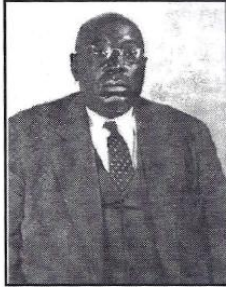


**Appendix 10**  
**Church Pictures from Anniversary Journal**

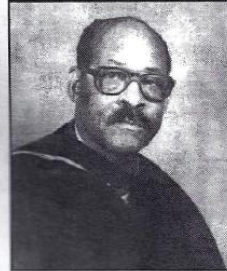


## Appendix 11

### Pastors of Mount Calvary: Church Anniversary Journal



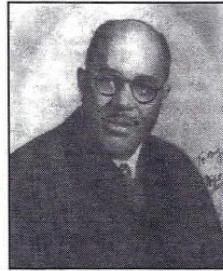
Reverend Silas L. Dupree (1919-1943)



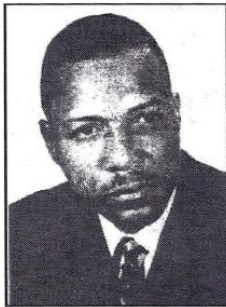
Reverend James H. Hamer (1943-1951)



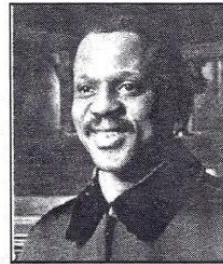
Reverend Herbert S. Sumpter (1951-1955)



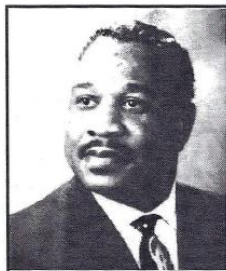
Reverend D. Edwards Wells (1955-1964)



Reverend Robert E. Rasberry (1965-1973)



Rev. Gordon C. O'Neal, Jr. (1974-1993)



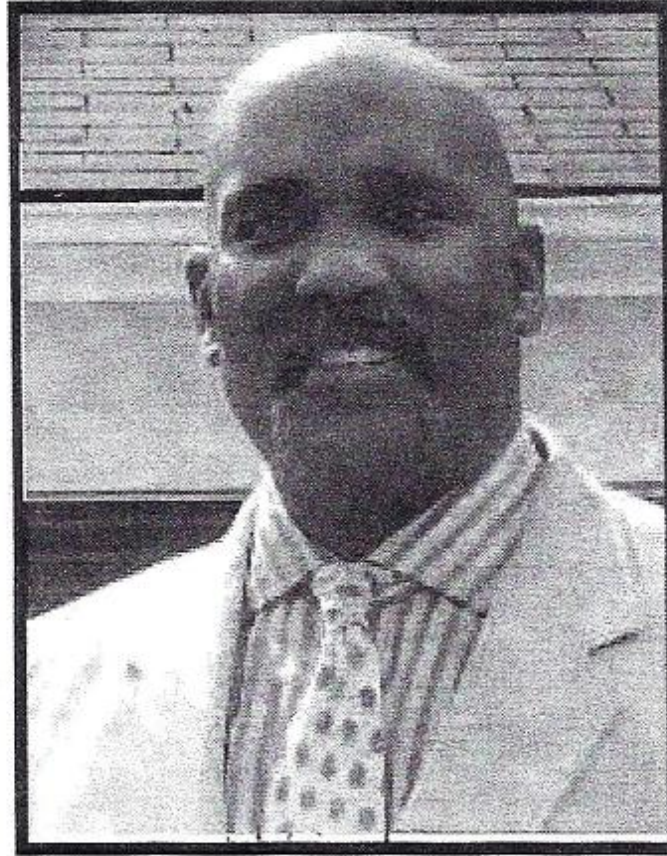
Rev. Walter Thompson, Jr. (1994-2001)



Reverend Johnny M. Wilson, Jr. (2003-2006)



**Appendix 12**  
**Ninth Pastor: Church Anniversary Journal**



**Reverend Mark E. Flowers, Pastor  
(2008 - Present)**

**Appendix 13**  
**Procession Song**

Siyahamb' ekukhanyen' kwenkhos',	We are marching in the light of God,
Siyahamb' ekukhanyen' kwenkhos',	We are marching in the light of God,
Siyahamb' ekukhanyen' kwenkhos',	We are marching in the light of God,
Siyahamb' ekukhanyen' kwen-,	We are marching in the light of,
Khanyen' kwenkhos',	The light of God,
Siyahamba, hamba,	We are marching, marching,
Siyahamba, hamba,	We are marching, marching,
Siyahamb' ekukhanyen' kwen-,	We are marching in the light of,
Khanyen' kwenkhos'.	The light of God,
Siyahamba, hamba,	We are marching, marching,
Siyahamba, hamba,	We are marching, marching,
Siyahamb' ekukhanyen' kwenkhos'.	We are marching in the light of God.

## **Appendix 14**

### **Ashanti Prayer**

#### **Ashanti Prayer for Blessing**

O Lord, O God,  
creator Of Our land, our earth, the trees,  
the animals and humans, all is for your honor

The drums beat it out, and people sing about it,  
and they dance with noisy joy that you are the Lord.

You also have pulled the other continents out of the sea.  
What a wonderful world you have made out of the wet mud,  
and what beautiful men and women!

We thank you for the beauty of this earth.  
The grace of your creation is like a cool day between rainy seasons.  
We drink in your creation with our eyes.  
We listen to the birds' jubilee with our ears.

How strong and good and sure your earth smells, and everything that grows there.  
The sky above us is like a warm, soft Kente cloth, because you are behind it,  
else it would be cold and rough and uncomfortable.

We drink in your creation and cannot get enough of it.  
But in doing this we forget the evil we have done.

Lord, we call you, we beg you:  
tear us away from our sins and our death.  
This wonderful world fades away.  
And one day our eyes snap shut, and all is over and dead that is not from you.

We are still slaves of the demons and the fetishes of this earth.  
When we are not saved by you.

Bless us.  
Bless our land and people.  
Bless our forests with mahogany, wawa, and cacao.  
Bless our fields with cassava and peanuts.  
Bless the waters that flow through our land.

Fill them with fish and drive great schools of fish to our seacoast,  
so that the fishermen in their unsteady boats do not need to go out too far.

Be with us youth in our countries, and in all Africa, and in the whole world.  
Prepare us for the service that we should render.

<http://www.godprayers.org/Ashanti-Prayer-Blessing>.

## Appendix 15

### One Love Song

Artist	Bob Marley
Song	One Love
<p style="text-align: center;"> One Love, One Heart  Let's get together and feel all right  Hear the children crying (One Love)  Hear the children crying (One Heart)  Sayin' give thanks and praise to the Lord and I will feel all right  Sayin' let's get together and feel all right  Let them all pass all their dirty remarks (One Love)  There is one question I'd really like to ask (One Heart)  Is there a place for the hopeless sinner  Who has hurt all mankind just to save his own?  Believe me  One Love, One Heart  Let's get together and feel all right  As it was in the beginning (One Love)  So shall it be in the end (One Heart)  Give thanks and praise to the Lord and I will feel all right  One more thing  Let's get together to fight this Holy Armageddon (One Love)  So when the Man comes there will be no no doom (One Song)  Have pity on those whose chances grow thinner  There ain't no hiding place from the Father of Creation  Sayin' One Love, One Heart  Let's get together and feel all right  I'm pleading to mankind (One Love)  Oh Lord (One Heart)  Give thanks and praise to the Lord and I will feel all right  Let's get together and feel all right </p>	

## Dance Africa Program/“Our Griot”



Greetings from Baba Chuck Davis



PLAY IT INTO A TIGHT ONE: AFB SAN JOSE'S REVENUE

TO DAKOTA TRIGAS DETENTION, FAMILY  
May 2009

Thank you.

Meetings: • all extended DanceAfrica family members: from New York to Chicago, to Dallas, DC and Durham.

Our ingenuity, trailing from our conditions in a long line to the north of us, Africa, and spreading throughout the Americas, have not an unequalled precedent for maintaining the rich and diverse and, only in the development of the world's progress.

[illegible]

J. Sosa Chuck Davis, Artistic Director of DanceAfrica America, extends heartfelt thanks to all for your continuing support. We are truly blessed with blessings seen and unseen as our Rhythmic Reflection reminds our African leaders to be Hallowed.

14612 • J. Neurosci., September 24, 2008 • 28(39):14605–14612

James J. Jones  
Sweet Springs

FABRICE CHIFFOLEAU

### Program

DanceAfrica 2009

Rhythmic Reflection: African Legacies Revealed

**Adrian's Copier**

Baba Chuck Davis offers greetings and a welcome to this 2006 Bantaba where we collectively celebrate our African heritage.

Processing/

These newly seated members of our distinguished Council of Elders and their spouses, led by Mirna Kankiah, (Mirna Kankiah) and Esha Lee Johnson, make their entrance now to the ceremony.

**Keywords:** self-esteem; self-concept; self-identity

Farafina Kan

Artist: Director: *Ujwal Mahiri-Badjinha Katta*

Harvey Sincere Nkomo Cunningham, Effie Akoto, Birtou Kouyaté, Bryan Johnson, Akosua Akorn

Lead Singer: Lance Logina, Martin

Lead Singer: Dancer Lesina Martin  
Dancers: Mones Valburah, Kwaku

Manajemen Director & Sarjana Djalil Sughesto

Managing Director & Partner  
Senior, Kofi Darkwa Akoto

Author: Kofi Darkwa  
 Title: Ishari Exams

Technique Assistant Manager, Omani

Techin: Asasiri Kwame Opare  
Tidre: Abena Ena Amankwa 'Ma

\*Hosi Abera Ena Amankwan (Mama Minkini) Mama Akua Kanyate, Marn Afia Nson Akotn

### The Rebirth of our Ancestries

This week focuses on three mythological figures: *Chimera*, *Zarath*, and *She Slay* from Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire. This fiery and compelling lives, dreams, and songs box set is only as long as it is paid for. Tickets are \$100 each. We are sharing this on a special day to help the children of the world. All our proceeds go to help the children of the world.

**Yammaro**, a name awarded the people who settled over the city, is from the Senuo, Region of Guinea.  
**Zaouli**, has literally the meaning of the summit, is from the Gounda People, Dore D'Awra.  
**Gbe Gbe**, some scholars are assuming it is identifying a place and an illness, is from the Gede D'Awra, some also the Gede D'Awra.

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**Memorial**

**Memorial**  
We pay homage to those associated with DanceAfrica who have made the transition to the Ancestral grounds. Please call the names of your ancestors as candle bearers, ex. down the aisle.



## Appendix 16 Continued

### Dance Africa

**2009 Spring Season**

**Brooklyn Academy of Music**  
Alan H. Fichman, Chairman of the Board  
William L. Campbell, Vice Chairman of the Board  
Adam E. Max, Vice Chairman of the Board  
Karen Brooks Hopkins, President  
Joseph M. Melillo, Executive Producer  
Presents

**DanceAfrica 2009**

*Approximate running time: 100 hours including two intermissions* **Rhythmic Reflection: African Legacies Revealed**  
BAM Howard Gilman Opera House  
May 22, 2009 at 7:30pm; May 23 at 2pm & 7:30pm;  
May 24 & 25 at 2pm

Artistic director **Chuck Davis**  
Lighting design **William H. Grant III**

**Evidence, A Dance Company** (Brooklyn)  
**Farafina Kan** (Washington, DC)  
**The SeëWê African Dance Company** (New York City)  
and  
**BAM/Restoration DanceAfrica Ensemble** (Brooklyn)

Stage manager **N'Goma Woolbright**  
Resident stage manager **Normadlen Woolbright**  
Production stage manager **Brian Westmoreland**

BAM 2009 Spring Season is sponsored by Rhombus.  
Jagga State is a major sponsor for DanceAfrica 2009, with additional support provided by Len Lefson.  
DanceAfrica 2009 is part of DanceAfrica at BAM, presented by Pina Biondi Inc.  
Additional support for DanceAfrica 2009 is provided by Church & DWG, Peking, LLC, and New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation. Grants and in-kind support is provided by the New York Times Community Affairs Department.  
BAM Dance receives major support from The Hoffman Foundation for Dance, The Jerome Robbins Foundation, and The SHS Foundation, with additional support from Mary L. Hughes & Mary Hughes Burke Foundation.  
Food and beverage support provided by 1775 Sparkling Juice, Elan European Restaurant, and Medice Restaurant.

## **Appendix 17**

### **Plan of Implementation**

#### Plan of Implementation

Goal One - To raise awareness of the multifaith identity and the African heritage worship practices exhibited in the traditional Black Baptist Church.

#### STRATEGIES

1. Conduct a series of informative workshops on the formation of the Black Baptist Church emphasizing the multifaith component of African liturgical genre that survived the Middle Passage. (from Mid-April – November 2009)(me, a researcher and guest facilitator);
2. I and a representative number will observe a Spiritual Baptist worship.<sup>93</sup>
3. I and a representative number will attend a Yoruba, Worship ( an example of Indigenous African Spirituality)<sup>94</sup>
4. I and a representative number will attend a Mosque
5. I and a representative number will attend an African festival.

The parishioners of the Mount Calvary Baptist Church of Springfield, Massachusetts will participate in a guided exploration of the history of the African

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<sup>93</sup> The Spiritual Baptist (or Shouter Baptist) faith is an [Afro-Caribbean religion](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Afro-Caribbean_religion) which combines elements of traditional West [African](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/African_religions) religions with [Christianity](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianity)  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spiritual\\_Baptist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spiritual_Baptist)

<sup>94</sup> The Yorùbá religion comprises religious beliefs and practices of the [Yoruba people](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yoruba_people) of old before the Yoruba community encountered Islam, Christianity and other faiths  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yoruba\\_religion](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yoruba_religion)

## Appendix 17 Continued

American Baptist Church movement and the development of its liturgy from a multifaceted, multifaith, indigenous African beginning. These parishioners will be encouraged to examine the evolutionary aspects of their own liturgy to reveal a subsequent multifaith African heritage. By drawing inferences from their own liturgical legacy, tracing the history of specific worship components that make their liturgical expression different from other Black Baptist church in Springfield will generate curiosity among the participants to their unique worship genre. It is important to note here that over fifty percent of Mount Calvary's membership have at least for two generations been connected to Mount Calvary therefore many of our families in the church can trace the evolvement of Mount Calvary's liturgy for most of the church's ninety year history. There unique liturgical features such as the "Children's Story Hour", the parishioners holding hands as they gather at the altar, the style and order of the procession into worship, and the intermittent episodes "shouting" during the corporate worship will be expounded upon by them as an introduction to the Black Baptist church liturgy and their relationship to the traditional African worship liturgy.

I and several guest presenters will conduct a series of informative workshops on the genesis of the Black Baptist church focusing on its unique and ecstatic genre of worship derived from Africa. A representative number of participants will experience a Yoruba festival Worship, will visit a Mosque, attend an African Festival, and observe a Trinidad Spiritual Baptist Worship Service. Journaling each experience, they will identify similar heritage worship practices thereby forming a

## Appendix 17 Continued

basis for multifaith interconnectedness of traditional religious African worship practice that has influenced their present liturgy.

Goal Two - Recruit and train a supportive team to develop a Sankofa Liturgy Model.

The team will be composed of site team, church and community members.

### Strategies

1. Select, and orient the team. (me March 2009)
2. Team will research “Sankofa” – (March-June 2009)
3. The supportive team and I will research the components of African American liturgy borrowed from Africa,
4. Training session on liturgy development. (a specialist on liturgy)( May 2009)

The supportive team will be selected by me and the site team from the pool of participants attending the initial awareness raising workshops. More specifically, those that comprise the supportive team are a representative number of forward thinkers albeit, those who are not afraid to journey from the confinement of a traditional Black Baptist mindset in order to develop a creative liturgy based on conjoining then incorporating traditional African worship practices with their current form of liturgy. The supportive team will include those participants that have maintained thorough journal notes and are willing to move forward in the creation of the Sankofa Liturgy.

After recruitment of the supportive team, I will orient the team to my passion towards a Sankofa Liturgy Model by vision casting. I will impart to them the need for the parishioners of Mount Calvary to be restored to their “royal” and respected worship style as a way to lift our community encouraging us to be the “head and not the tail.”

## Appendix 17 Continued

### Goal Three - Create a Sankofa Liturgy Model

- 1- conduct a session to pull together information received from awareness building  
identify core components to included in the liturgy
- 2- Conduct a session with the team to write the steps to liturgy model
- 3- Perform a Sankofa worship service

In this particular goal, the five members of the supportive team will engage in several think tank exercises. The first session will involve their coming together to identify key components of liturgy they have defined as traditional religious African worship practices and they will decide what to include in the Sankofa Model. The team will construct and record all of the components of the liturgy model. Lastly, the team will coordinate the performance of the Sankofa Liturgy Model for the entire community during Harvest in November at the Mount Calvary Church.

## Appendix 17 Continued

### Research Questions

#### Historical

What are the traditional African worship practices that have been included in traditional Black Baptist liturgy?

The Black Baptist church in America liturgy is dually indicative of their chattel origin and the remnants of the African traditional worship that survived the middle passage through the cultural memory of enslaved Africans. Yet the multifaceted essence of the traditional African worship practice includes Christianity that pre-dates the European Missionary expeditions, Islam and a plethora of indigenous African Spiritual practices that survived the fusion of an American-European liturgy forced upon the chattel church that is definitively multifaceted of the Black Baptist Church. A distinction between the liturgical components and genre of traditional African, traditional Black Baptist and American European needs to be identified. The research will explore and define the rituals of the traditional African worshipful use of prayer, spiritual manifestation (i.e., shouting), the procession into worship, and music making in worship; then interface these liturgical components with the liturgical genre of the traditional Black Baptist church. The research will also define the notion of a traditional Black Baptist church as a conservative aggregation that would benefit by embracing these time honored African worship traditions in its liturgy in order to be a distinct and respected agency of community as opposed to a relic of American folklore.

## Appendix 17 Continued

### Methodological

What is liturgy in the Black Baptist Church?

There is liturgy defined, and there is liturgy as defined by the Black Baptist church. The liturgy of the Mount Calvary Baptist Church of Springfield, Massachusetts is generally referred to as an “Order of Worship”, a program or a bulletin, titles of which are generally printed at the top of the Sunday worship guide. This question seeks to determine whether the Black Church considers their Sunday Morning program outline to be liturgy or an order of worship, and a distinction must be made between the two. The inquiry must define liturgy as well as the components of liturgy. Therefore methodological research will define liturgy as the way it is contrived and manipulated by formidable denominations of European descent, such as the Anglicans and how it is used in the Black Baptist church.

### Theological

Do Traditional Black Baptist the same God as the time honored African Indigenous religions?

Given the discomfort the team experienced while observing the use of snakes in an African Voodoo ceremony and the animist ritual of initiation described in Yoruba, the summit of Theological uneasiness for this team was rooted in the argument of Polytheism or Monotheism; hence the query: “Do we worship the same God as our African predecessors?” is answered in a creative interpretation of the Triune God which Black Baptist worship through the doctrine of the trinity. The National Black Baptist Convention, USA ascribe to the interpretation of the trinity based on the Baptist Articles

## Appendix 17 Continued

of Faith as adopted by the New Hampshire Confession 1853. Baptist believes that there is “one true and living God” who consists of three unified personalities that are divinely equal. This definition of God tends to be confusing for Black Baptist and as well as to the time-honored African religions we seek restoration to.

Herein forms the discourse between Polytheism and Monotheism that can either respectfully unite Black Baptist to their multifaith identity or cause further disruption. The purpose is not to intellectualize a multifaith ethic in order to enhance the liturgy of Mount Calvary, but first to document then practice Divine worship from a celebration of commonality.

### Evaluation Process

The desired outcome of this Sankofa Liturgy Model is to facilitate a transformative process for the Mount Calvary Faith community through their worship. The creative design of the Sankofa Liturgy is to encourage Mount Calvary’s respect of their unique style of worship by upholding it as an authentic, time-honored worship tradition. Eradication of the notion of that the worship liturgy of a traditional Black Baptist church must resemble the confinement bestowed upon them by its chattel past but should flourish in the performance of its traditional African Religious Worship genre.

Transformation would result in Mount Calvary not just incorporating African Heritage during Black History Month, but a willingness to embrace its Afro centrality consistently throughout the calendar year- particularly in November as the Sankofa Liturgy Model will be an annual event in the Springfield area. Transformation will also result in the parishioners embracing in a respectful way their worshipful complexion- the



## Appendix 17 Continued

clamor, the rhythm, the emotion, the exclusivity, the distinctiveness that surmises the complexion of worship.

Assessment will occur at every level of the project by way of questionnaires, participants' journals, scales and documented observation of "worship change".

Five persons will be able to construct a liturgy in November. The Mount Calvary Baptist Church will celebrate their Black Heritage in February (Black History Month) and November (Sankofa Liturgy) annually. At least five persons will be able to define three components of liturgy and celebrate the ecstatic genre of the liturgy based on performance-prayer, processional, dance, spiritual manifestation.

### Ministerial Competencies

Considering the fact that I am a new pastor to the Mount Calvary faith community and had just completed several grueling months of interview sessions with numerous inquiries as well as preaching, teaching and worship leading opportunities the first competency that the site team identified is my skilled acumen towards worship leading and liturgy planning. In the initial meetings with my site team, they lauded my ability to lead the worship in such a way that the parishioners are totally engaged to the point where the preaching proclamation is well received, yet the height of the worship experience is as the invitation to Christian Discipleship is offered. The site team indicated that the new printed liturgy with its corresponding sub-titles has helped them to understand more fully the purpose of worship. Moreover, they have noted that I am "out-of-the- box, yet rooted in the understanding and implementations of our sacraments.

## Appendix 17 Continued

The site team has determined that as a competent preacher I am able to effectively organize material, interpret scripture and empower parishioners to grow spiritually. They have stated that my preaching messages usually border in the realm of social justice, and liberation theology of which has inspired an enhanced sensitivity and involvement in the churches various missions work.

Regrettably I became hesitant around the discussion of “risk taking” in performing ministerial duties which is a competency that I with the help of the site team will be honed during this project. Assuredly, this project this project has an inherent indictment, not solely on the parishioner but on us all to take the risk of being restored to our multifaith identity by embracing Traditional African Religious worship practices. The site team aggresses that I need to further develop an ability to involve others in the process of seeking social change and acknowledge the need for transformation through worship.

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